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1993 - A YEAR OF INTERRELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PLURALITY

A Significant Ecumenical Consultation in Baar, Switzerland

S. Wesley Ariarajah

"Is God listening to my Hindu neighbour's prayer?" The question is simple, but Christians have enormous difficulty in responding to it. By and large, Christians have ignored theological questions relating to God's life with our neighbours of other religious traditions and their life with God.

At the heart of this hesitation lies a number of profound theological issues. Does God's self-revelation take place in nature, in all human history, and in human experience? Or does God reveal Godself only through the specific historical experience of a people within one stream of history? Is it important to have an adequate (if any) understanding of who God is, before God begins to listen to our prayers?

Of a more fundamental nature are questions that lie at the heart of the Christian faith itself. What is the relationship between God's saving activity in the life, death and resurrection of Christ to God's presence and activity in all history? How does one reconcile the affirmation that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" with the Johannine verse: "No one comes to the Father except through me"?

Since the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement these questions have engaged the attention of the missionary movement and the Church. The practice of dialogue and reflection upon it have brought a new sense of urgency to these questions. We need to base our relationship with our neighbours of other faiths on a theological foundation.

Much of the theology of religions operative in Christian thinking was enumerated during the height of the missionary movement. Reflections on other faiths served the missionary imperative, and provided justification for the extension of the Church at the expense of other religions. The theology of religions did not arise out of the experience of a living encounter with others but from a deductive thinking from the standpoint of one's own faith. A selective reading of the Bible reinforced a mission-serving theology of religions. Nevertheless, at all the early major missionary conferences (e.g. Edinburgh 1910, Jerusalem 1928, Tambaram 1938) there were voices that challenged the predominant attitude which saw little faith-value in other traditions. But a mainly mission-oriented theology of religions has survived.

At both the Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver (1983) assemblies of the WCC, dialogue became a controversial point, primarily because of the implicit assumptions made in dialogue about the theological significance of other faiths. At Vancouver, for example, a major stream within the Assembly rejected the possibility of God's presence and activity in the religious life of our neighbours.

The Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC undertook a four-year study programme on 'My Neighbour's Faith and Mine - Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue'. As the apex of this study, delegates from the Orthodox, Protestant

and Roman Catholic traditions were brought together to reflect on some of these issues. A week of intense discussions centred on questions such as the significance of religious plurality, christology, and the issues in understanding the activity of the Spirit in the world. The document which follows is a statement made by the members of this consultation, which was held in Baar, near Zurich, Switzerland in January 1990. It is hoped that the statement will help to animate and facilitate the discussion of these important issues as we face the Seventh Assembly in Canberra in February 1991.

S. Wesley Ariarajah

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BAAR STATEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Dialogue with people of living faiths has been part of the work of the WCC since 1971 when the Central Committee meeting in Addis Ababa affirmed that dialogue "is to be understood as the common adventure of the churches".

Since the Nairobi WCC Assembly in 1975 this common adventure has been seen primarily as "dialogue in community". This has meant entering into dialogue with our neighbours of other faiths in the communities we as Christians share with them, exploring such issues as peace, justice, and humanity's relation to nature. We have found repeatedly that Christians may not behave as if we were the only people of faith as we face common problems of an interdependent world. It is evident the various religious traditions of the world have much to contribute in wisdom and inspiration towards solving these problems.

In this ecumenical consultation we have reaffirmed the importance of Dialogue in Community as articulated in the Guidelines on Dialogue (1979). We also recall the affirmation of the Central Committee in adopting these guidelines: "To enter into dialogue requires an opening of the mind and heart to others. It is an undertaking which requires risk as well as a deep sense of vocation" (Central Committee, Kingston, Jamaica, 1979).

We turned our attention with particular urgency to the theological questions that have emerged from the practice of dialogue. As the Guidelines suggested: "Christians engaged in faithful 'dialogue in community' with people of other faiths....cannot avoid asking themselves penetrating questions about the place of these people in the activity of God in history. They ask these questions not in theory, but in terms of what God may be doing in the lives of hundreds of millions of men and women who live in and seek community together with Christians, but along different ways" (Guidelines, p.11).

Dialogue with people of other living faiths leads us to ask what is the relation of the diversity of religious traditions to the mystery of the one Triune God? It is clear to us that interfaith dialogue has implications not

only for our human relations in community with people of other faiths, but for our Christian theology as well.

From the beginning Christians have encountered people of other faiths, and from time to time theologians have grappled with the significance of religious plurality. The modern ecumenical movement from its earliest beginnings (Edinburgh 1910) has made many attempts to understand the relation of the Christian message to the world of many faiths.

Today our greater awareness and appreciation of religious plurality leads us to move in this "common adventure" toward a more adequate theology of religions. There is a widely felt need for such a theology, for without it Christians remain ill-equipped to understand the profound religious experiences which they witness in the lives of people of other faiths or to articulate their own experience in a way that will be understood by people of other faiths.

II. A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Our theological understanding of religious plurality begins with our faith in the one God who created all things, the living God, present and active in all creation from the beginning. The Bible testifies to God as God of all nations and peoples, whose love and compassion includes all humankind. We see in the Covenant with Noah a covenant with all creation. We see His wisdom and justice extending to the ends of the earth as He guides the nations through their traditions of wisdom and understanding. God's glory penetrates the whole of creation.

People have at all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them, and have given their witness to their encounters with the Living God. In this testimony they speak both of seeking and of having found salvation, or wholeness, or enlightenment, or divine guidance, or rest, or liberation.

We therefore take this witness with the utmost seriousness and acknowledge that among all the nations and peoples there has always been the saving presence of God. Though as Christians our testimony is always to the salvation we have experienced through Christ, we at the same time "cannot set limits to the saving power of God" (CWME, San Antonio 1989). Our own ministry of witness among our neighbours of other faiths must presuppose an "affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them" (CWME, San Antonio 1989).

We see the plurality of religious traditions as both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of humankind. We affirm that God has been present in their seeking and finding, that where there is truth and wisdom in their teachings, and love and holiness in their living, this like any wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, love and holiness that is found among us is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We also affirm that God is with them as they struggle, along with us, for justice and liberation.

This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples. A refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as creator of all things and father of human-kind. "The Spirit of God is at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of Christ and the way God deals with humanity" (CWME Statement, Mission and Evangelism).

It is our Christian faith in God which challenges us to take seriously the whole realm of religious plurality. We see this not so much as an obstacle to be overcome, but rather as an opportunity for deepening our encounter with God and with our neighbours as we await the fulfilment when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15-18). Seeking to develop new and greater understandings of "the wisdom, love and power which God has given to men (and women) of other faiths" (New Delhi Report, 1961), we must affirm our "openness to the possibility that the God we know in Jesus Christ may encounter us also in the lives of our neighbours of other faiths" (CWME Report, San Antonio 1989, para. 29). The one God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ has not left Himself without witness, anywhere (Acts 14:17).

Ambiguity in the Religious Traditions

Any affirmation of the positive qualities of wisdom, love, compassion, and spiritual insight in the world's religious traditions must also speak with honesty and with sadness of the human wickedness and folly that is also present in all religious communities. We must recognize the ways in which religion has functioned too often to support systems of oppression and exclusion. Any adequate theology of religions must deal with human wickedness and sin, with disobedience to spiritual insight and failure to live in accordance with the highest ideals. Therefore we are continually challenged by the Spirit to discern the wisdom and purposes of God.

III. CHRISTOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Because we have seen and experienced goodness, truth and holiness among followers of other paths and ways than that of Jesus Christ, we are forced to confront with total seriousness the question raised in the Guidelines on Dialogue (1979) concerning the universal creative and redemptive activity of God towards all humankind and the particular redemptive activity of God in the history of Israel and in the person and work of Jesus Christ (para. 23). We find ourselves recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

We affirm that in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, the entire human family has been united to God in an irrevocable bond and covenant. The saving presence of God's activity in all creation and human history comes to its focal point in the event of Christ.

In Jesus's words and action, in His proclamation, in His ministry of healing and service, God was establishing His reign on earth, a sovereign rule whose presence and power cannot be limited to any one community or culture. The attitudes of Jesus as He reached out to those beyond the house of Israel testify to this universal reign. He spoke with the woman of Samaria, affirming all who would worship God in Spirit and truth (Jn. 4:7-24). He marvelled at the faith of a centurion, acknowledging that He had not found such faith in all Israel (Matt. 8:5-11). For the sake of a Syro-Phoenician woman, and in response to her faith, He performed a miracle of healing (Matt. 15:21-28).

But while it appears that the saving power of the reign of God made present in Jesus during His earthly ministry was in some sense limited (cf. Matt. 10:23), through the event of His death and resurrection, the paschal mystery itself, these limits were transcended. The cross and the resurrection disclose for us the universal dimension of the saving mystery of God.

This saving mystery is mediated and expressed in many and various ways as God's plan unfolds toward its fulfilment. It may be available to those outside the fold of Christ (Jn. 10:16) in ways we cannot understand, as they live faithful and truthful lives in their concrete circumstances and in the framework of the religious traditions which guide and inspire them. The Christ event is for us the clearest expression of the salvific will of God in all human history. (I Tim. 2:4)

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

We have been especially concerned in this Consultation with the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who moved and still moves over the face of the earth to create, nurture, challenge, renew and sustain. We have learned again to see the activity of the Spirit as beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations, as "the wind blows where it wills" (Jn. 3:8). We have marvelled at the "economy" of the Spirit in all the world, and are full of hope and expectancy. We see the freedom of the Spirit moving in ways which we cannot predict, we see the nurturing power of the Spirit bringing order out of chaos and renewing the face of the earth, and the 'energies' of the Spirit working within and inspiring human beings in their universal longing for and seeking after truth, peace and justice. Everything which belongs to 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' is properly to be recognized and acknowledged as the fruit of the activity of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23, cf. Rom. 14:17).

We are clear, therefore, that a positive answer must be given to the question raised in the Guidelines on Dialogue (1979) "is it right and helpful to understand the work of God outside the Church in terms of the Holy Spirit" (para. 23). We affirm unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of living faiths.

Further we affirm that it is within the realm of the Spirit that we may be able to interpret the truth and goodness of other religions and distinguish the "things that differ", so that our "love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9-10).

We also affirm that the Holy Spirit, the Interpreter of Christ and of our own Scriptures (Jn. 14:26) will lead us to understand afresh the deposit of the faith already given to us, and into fresh and unexpected discovery of new wisdom and insight, as we learn more from our neighbours of other faiths.

V. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Our recognition of the mystery of salvation in men and women of other religious traditions shapes the concrete attitudes with which we Christians must approach them in interreligious dialogue.

We need to respect their religious convictions, different as these may be from our own, and to admire the things which God has accomplished and continues to accomplish in them through the Spirit. Interreligious dialogue is therefore a "two-way street". Christians must enter into it in a spirit of openness, prepared to receive from others, while on their part, they give witness of their own faith. Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other. Through the witness of others, we Christians can truly discover facets of the divine mystery which we have not yet seen or responded to. The practice of dialogue will thus result in the deepening of our own life of faith. We believe that walking together with people of other living faiths will bring us to a fuller understanding and experience of truth.

We feel called to allow the practice of interreligious dialogue to transform the way in which we do theology. We need to move toward a dialogical theology in which the praxis of dialogue together with that of human liberation, will constitute a true locus theologicus, i.e. both a source and basis for theological work. The challenge of religious plurality and the praxis of dialogue are part of the context in which we must search for fresh understandings, new questions, and better expressions of our Christian faith and commitment.

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1993: A YEAR OF INTERRELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION

Marcus Braybrooke

In 1993 the interfaith movement will celebrate its 100th birthday. This will come as a surprise to those who speak of interfaith dialogue as being still 'in its babyhood' or 'not yet come of age'.

Although isolated figures like the Emperors Asoka and Akbar or Nicholas of Cusa advocated religious tolerance, the beginnings of the interfaith movement are usually traced to the World Parliament of Religions, which was held in Chicago in 1893.

The World Parliament of Religions

Chicago had been chosen as the venue for a World Fair to mark the 400th anniversary of the 'discovery' of America by Christopher Columbus. To accompany the fair, a series of congresses on the chief areas of human knowledge were arranged. When it came to one on religion, although the organizing committee was predominantly Christian, it was agreed that all religions should be represented.

When the Conference opened on 11 September 1893, more than four thousand people crowded the Hall of Columbus, which is now part of the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue. At ten o'clock, representatives of a dozen faiths marched down the aisle to take their place on the platform. The General Programme lasted for seventeen days and in addition representatives of the great faiths gave expositions of their beliefs. The final session attracted more than seven thousand people. (There was a black market for tickets!) The President of the

Congress declared as the Parliament came to an end, "Henceforth the religions of the world will make war, not on each other, but on the giant evils that afflict mankind".

A century later after two world wars and numerous other conflicts and as religious intolerance seems again on the increase, this sounds a hollow hope. Yet recently, Professor Hans Kung, declared that there will be 'no peace in the world without peace among religions'. The hope that religious people might be respectful to each other and cooperative in service of humankind is still a haunting dream.

Who came?

Despite its name, the Parliament was predominantly Christian both in composition and presuppositions. Leading members of most American churches gave support, although there was some opposition. The attendance reflected the wide range of denominations in North America. Some Christian leaders from Europe and some missionaries in Africa and Asia either attended or sent messages of support. The question of how Christianity relates to other religions was a recurring subject of the lectures.

Several articulate American Jewish leaders took part and although only a handful of Asians were present, several had a great impact on the Parliament. Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of the Hindu seer, Sri Ramakrishna, was described by *The New York Times* as "undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of

Religions". Addressing the audience as "Sisters and Brothers of America", he said, that as a Hindu he was proud "to belong to a religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance".

Dharmapala, a child of Ceylon, had already begun his important work of publicizing the country's Buddhist heritage. Two years before the Parliament, he had founded in Colombo what became known as the Maha Bodhi Society. His stress on the scientific nature of Buddhism caught the attention of many people at the Parliament and he stressed that if missionaries wanted to establish Christianity in the East, it could only be done on the "principles of Christ's love and meekness".

The Japanese Buddhist, Shaku Soyen, who in 1892 at the age of 33, had become chief abbot of Engaku-ji, Kamakura, pleaded for world peace and mutual assistance. "Let us, the true followers of Buddha, the true followers of Jesus Christ, the true followers of Confucius and the followers of truth, unite ourselves for the sake of helping the helpless and living glorious lives of brotherhood under the control of truth". Soyen made two subsequent visits to the West, accompanied by his disciple D.T. Suzuki, who was to play a vital part in making Buddhism known in America and Europe.

A few other Buddhists came from Japan, as well as a Shintoist. From India, two leading members of the Brahma Samaj, a Hindu Reform Movement, attended as well as a Jain, two Muslims and a member of the Theosophical movement. There were a few participants from Africa.

Interfaith developments in this century

The Parliament gave an impetus to the scholarly study of religions. Now,

universities in many parts of the world have departments for the study of religions and in some countries children learn a little about the teachings and practices of all great religions. In 1901, the First International Congress for the History of Religions was held in Paris and from a series of such meetings, the International Association for the History of Religions eventually emerged.

No one organization, however, can claim to be the successor of the World Parliament of Religions. What is now known as The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) was founded in Boston, USA, in 1900. Although originally drawing most of its support from Unitarians, Universalists and Free Christians, it had from the first some members of the Brahma Samaj and has now become a worldwide multifaith fellowship. The triennial Congresses are major events, with participants coming from many countries and religions. IARF has also developed its work of social service to those in need.

In 1921, Rudolf Otto convened a Religious League of Mankind, as a religious counterpart of the League of Nations. In 1933, during Chicago's second World Fair, 'The First Assembly of the World Fellowship of Faiths - a second Parliament of Religions was convened'. One of those who took an active part was Sir Francis Younghusband, an explorer and mystic, who in 1936 convened the World Congress of Faiths in London. Both the World Fellowship and the World Congress attracted an impressive range of speakers.

From the 1936 gathering, the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) emerged as a continuing organization. Although British based, it has had links with similar groups in many parts of the world and its journal, *World Faiths Insight*, has a readership scattered across the world. Although disclaiming any particular view of the

relationship of religions, many of its leaders, such as Bishop George Appleton, have pointed to an underlying mystical unity. The Congress has pioneered exploring the possibility of people of many faiths being together to pray. It has also helped to provide an intellectual rationale for the interfaith movement, attracting speakers of the calibre of Hans Kung, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Raimundo Panikkar.

Rather similar in aim is the New York based Temple of Understanding, inspired by Juliette Hollister. It held its first Spiritual Summit Conference in Calcutta in 1968 and has mounted a series of major international conferences, as well as a continuing educational programme. It also helped to provide the religious input to the Global Forum of Religious and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, who held their first meeting in Oxford in 1988 and their second in Moscow in 1990. The Temple's President, Dean James Parks Morton, is also co-chairperson of the Global Forum.

All the above organisations hope their work will contribute to peace and human understanding, but the urgency of peace has united many religiously committed people in The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). WCRP has held five world assemblies and has built up an impressive international network of local chapters. The present Secretary General is Dr. John Taylor, who for several years was on the staff of the World Council of Churches. The first Secretary General, Dr. Homer Jack, said after the Second (Louvain) Assembly that "we have learned, in using our religious and ethical insights, to leap over theology and discuss the next steps for human survival which tend to parallel the agenda of the United Nations". Perhaps because discussion of the theological differences between religions have been avoided, WCRP has

had considerable success in attracting support from those with a leadership role in their faith communities.

It is also true that the importance of interreligious dialogue and understanding has been increasingly recognized by leaders of all religions, as shown, for example, at the Assisi World Day of Prayer. The WCC, the Vatican and various other religious organisations have staff who devote themselves to dialogue. There are other organisations which concentrate on dialogue between particular religions, such as The International Council of Christians and Jews, or on one activity, such as The Week of Prayer for World Peace. There is a growing number of national and local interfaith groups or centres of dialogue.

In recent years, following two conferences at Ammerdown, near Bath in England, the links between various organisations seeking interreligious understanding are being strengthened. In an effort to make the achievements and the urgency of interfaith fellowship better known, 1993 is to be marked as 'A Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation'.

As their contribution to this, four organisations, IARF, the Temple of Understanding, WCF and WRCP are working together to arrange a major gathering in Bangalore, India, in August 1993. It is hoped, especially through widespread preliminary discussion, to build up a vision of the possibilities of interfaith cooperation in the next century. Other events to commemorate the 1893 World Parliament are being planned in Chicago and elsewhere.

The four organisations have also agreed to try to stimulate worldwide participation in the Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation. The ideal would be for every place of worship, as well as schools

and colleges, to devote some time and attention to the need for inter-religious understanding as part of their programme for 1993.

An invitation to you

It is important that you ensure that plans for the 1993 Year of Inter-religious Understanding and Cooperation are put on the agenda of your church or organisation now. When you know what special activity your church will be arranging, please write and tell David and Celia Storey at Rawmere, Rew Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 4QH, U.K. By sharing news of our activities, we shall feel more part of a worldwide movement. We also hope to be able to share educational and worship resource material.

1993 will give us all an opportunity to share in a worldwide celebration of the unity of the human family. It will be a chance to give thanks that with the wonderful variety of different races, colours, languages, religions and customs, we belong to one family. It is an occasion to

renew our efforts to ensure fullness of life for all members of that family.

Many people believe that the survival of life on this planet depends upon our realizing our oneness. For a just and peaceful world, we must replace competition with cooperation. We can only tackle the problems of war, poverty, homelessness and the environment, if we think and act on a global scale.

I hope that Christians everywhere will be keen to join in a year which will strengthen all who are working for reconciliation, justice and peace. As Charles Bonney said nearly one hundred years ago at the opening of the World Parliament of Religions, "when the religious faiths of the world recognize each other as brothers (and sisters), children of one Father, whom all profess to love and serve, then, and not till then, will the nations of the earth yield to the Spirit of concord and learn war no more".

(The Rev. Marcus Braybrooke is editor of World Faiths Insight)

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Toshi Arai and Wesley Ariarajah (eds)

SPIRITUALITY IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

"In walking along with the other, with the stranger, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have had, in our sharing, the experience of recognition. We have seen the unexpected Christ, and have been renewed."

So declared a group of people, Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, who came together at a meeting in Kyoto, Japan, organized jointly by the WCC's Sub-units on Dialogue and Renewal and Congregational Life. The testimonies and papers included in the book tell their stories of journeying together in dialogue and of the renewal it brought to them as individuals and communities.

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SALVATION IN A WORLD OF LIVING RELIGIONS

Theodor Ahrens

(Dr. Theodor Ahrens, who is a member of the faculty of the University of Hamburg, presented this paper to the Lutheran World Federation Assembly held in Curitiba, Brazil in February 1990)

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:5-6)

Two Christmas cards - two Christmas stories?

Among last year's Christmas cards two caught my special attention. Each had a "Christmasy" motif and an accompanying text.

The first card came from a business woman in Hamburg, a member of our church with a somewhat distanced relationship to it. This card spoke of the Prince of Peace, the divine figure of light, who, so the card said, returns every year "as the Son of God in human guise" and enables us to recognize once again the "divine light deep within us": Christmas, the reminder of the divine in our own selves, enlarging our awareness and reminding us of the heavenly home of the soul. The touchstone of salvation is the overcoming of "darkness", which consists among other things in a lack of knowledge.

The other card came from South Korea and referred to Bethlehem, to the time and place of Jesus' birth and to his mother. With a troubled heart she looks searchingly at the child in the darkness. The text goes on to say that he "will become the Messiah" because he will transform the history

of death into one of redemption and life. That is truth, wholly different from what the world's books impart. For the second card, the touchstone of Christian talk about salvation is: victory over the power of death.

Clearly there are not just many gods as Paul says. There are also several versions of the salvation Christ brings.

The nature of humanity's salvation is not in dispute simply between Christianity and other religions. It is a personal debate within each and every one of us and also within the church. Which of the two cards has Gospel support? Or do they share a comprehensive Christmas experience that embraces them both? I do not find the belief foreign solely or primarily to people who have found their identity under the wing of other religions, but find it also in myself, my congregation and so naturally in the Christian ecumenical movement too. In striving for clarity in our faith, and for commitment to a life that is in accordance with the Gospel, we at the same time always have to clarify our own mind in regard to convictions and attitudes that do not correspond to the Gospel and then to rise above them.

Pluralism, that much overworked description of our situation, is primarily a condition of the psyche - and something that exists within the church.

Pluralism is also a social and cultural factor - and here I am referring to my own microcosm in Hamburg. For a long time the Lutheran church was not only the official but also the dominant form of religion in Hamburg. Perhaps it still has enough flair to remain the "official" church in a formal sense - the "best address in the area", so to speak. But now it represents only a minority here in Hamburg. It is certainly no longer the dominant faith, that is, the religion which in practice determines how people run their lives. Many people have simply turned away from the church.

Another development is taking place alongside this. Worldwide migration movements and communication processes have led to a situation in which almost all religious traditions are putting down roots in our context as well - Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims in their various groupings, and also an innumerable variety of new religious initiatives ranging from American Indian nature mysticism to a wide range of so-called new religious movements. Immigrants, for instance, cannot continue unbroken the traditions of religious and cultural interpenetration they knew in their home environments. They have to make some adjustments. But the new situation in turn reinforces the effort to stick together and to establish group identity in small networks of sub-cultures.

Some religious traditions have found it easy to transcend ethnic boundaries. Hindu gurus, for instance, who can adapt their message and mode of operation to the modern leisure pattern in which the middle classes in

Europe frequently practise religion, occasionally achieve considerable missionary effectiveness among this part of the local population.

A few new religious movements nourished on eastern spirituality are even making some headway within the old Lutheran church and indeed press for recognition. The established Lutheran church, of course, which still has a large nominal membership, stands out from other religions in terms of its worship, organization and membership. But, to use a metaphor, it is like a porous tile. It stands out clearly from its surroundings, but is being permeated by seepage from quite a number of ideological and religious currents fashionable in our city.

Many Hamburg citizens want to go on living as they always have, and remain in the church to which they are accustomed. But quite a number of others - especially in the middle class - remind me of do-it-yourself enthusiasts or street artists, spraying pictures on walls with spray cans or piecing together a statue or image of the human from discarded materials of our civilization. More precisely we ought to say that they are experimenting with countercultural images and role models. Like these street artists, quite a few people are taking advantage of the new opportunities for religious choice and are putting together for themselves a model of modern life made up of fragments of their own tradition and scraps of free floating religious ideas and movements.

The developments decisive for the future of "dialogue" and "mission" - if that is how we choose to define the issue - are taking place in the simultaneous processes of turning away from and exerting influence on institutions and in the way people themselves lead their daily lives. As a rule, the dialogue of religious intellectuals so far conducted is quite remote from

people's everyday lives and will have relatively little impact. At this level, "dialogue" and "mission" are not two separate programmes but two aspects of one unplanned, tremendous, multi-layered, syncretistic process reaching out far beyond the churches and society as a whole.

For all the variety and competition of religious traditions, there are some ideas that strongly determine our context and therefore have an effect on all religious groups. To give an example, one dominant idea - religious because it is imparted symbolically - is that humanity's salvation lies in the happiness of the individual, in self-discovery and self-fulfilment in the private sphere. Weakened by a decrease in membership, the Lutheran church finds itself tempted to try its hand at this game, even though the message of salvation entrusted to it cannot easily be reconciled with currently fashionable religious hedonism.

It is no longer possible for the religions that are now at home in our context to obtain general political recognition and status for their frequently contrasting ideas of human salvation. No longer can religious truth-claims be translated directly into claims for political recognition. Religious pluralism is not merely a socio-cultural fact but also a political necessity. Most people in our society are agreed on that.

Religious truth claims remind us, in fact, that we have produced frightful systems making absolute claims to truth and salvation. I am thinking not only of the Inquisition, the religious wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants, enforced missionizing, and humourless fundamentalism. I am also thinking of Fascism, with its "salvation" ideology, which became the complete opposite of salvation for the Jews (ironically, "salvation" in

German is Heil!), and of Marxism-Leninism, with its absurd claims to knowledge of the laws of history, absolutist claims which - as we now know so dramatically - then have to be constantly rewritten. We know from experience how these claims to truth and absolute validity still claim their victims. Is it not even today more dangerous in many countries to believe or to think what is "wrong" or unacceptable than to commit criminal acts?

One of the inalienable freedoms of our small societies is that no religion is permitted to translate its religious truth-claims directly into a political order. Despite this the various religions remain challenged not only to co-exist peacefully within the polity of a state, but also to contribute jointly to the well-being of the whole world (not only of each particular society) insofar as they see this world as a proving ground for their beliefs. The challenges of local and global survival call for contributions from the various religions; for our society to survive, however, these different religions must renounce direct political claims.

Is religious pluralism in the last analysis also a theological requirement with its basis in the Gospel? Many would say, yes.

Starting once again from our position in Hamburg: we neither can nor shall eliminate the other religions through mission or evangelism. How then are we to relate to them? This is the initial question that has made many theoreticians seek a new basis for inter-religious dialogue. Various models have been suggested.

The story of Jesus Christ as a critique of every religion including Christianity as a religious enterprise.

Or alternatively, the idea that, notwithstanding the difference between religions, the religious Weltanschauung, and some would even say faith itself, is a common denominator of all religions and more important than all the differences. Others would go a step further and assert that a common salvation is reflected in the basic experiences of religion. But how are we supposed to compare religious experiences? - The most we can do is compare the effect of experience on language.

The main emphasis in a third model is the idea that we should begin with the question of humanity and its salvation. We should begin by leaving aside the old questions that seem to make dialogue so difficult - such as questions relating to God and the mediation of salvation. For example: are Krishna and Christ different names and manifestations of the same God or saviour or are they mediators of salvation with completely different histories? If we put such questions in brackets we would not get bogged down so quickly and would find a common platform for an inquiry about salvation. In this connection it is also occasionally suggested that we should go yet one step further and grant that in striving for the secret of their lives, all human beings are already in a state of salvation.

It may indeed be true that an awareness of a need for salvation, perhaps even a kind of awareness of transcendence (even if transcendence is encountered in immanence), is a common denominator of all religions. Who will undertake to prove or controvert that? But there is a further consideration: it might turn out that no sooner have we asked what it means to be truly human than the very questions we have shoved into the background - about God and his manifestations in this world - once more press into the foreground.

Drawing these threads together before I go on, I would say that we can engage in an encounter with people of other religions only with a full commitment to our own faith, and not by presupposing that salvation must be available in other religions as well. Even in the preliminary phase leading up to every dialogue, is the requirement to recognize and acknowledge the same salvation in other religious traditions any less presumptuous, than the conviction that at the end of the world the God of Jesus Christ, whom we believe and confess as a God of grace, really will exercise the prerogative of grace for His entire creation and thus vindicate the truth of His name?

The story of Jesus Christ and our biographies

"TODAY! salvation has come to this house", says Jesus to Zacchaeus, thus indicating at the beginning of his road to the cross that his visit to an "outcast" was a sign of the Kingdom of God (Luke 19). Corresponding to this we find the following in the Christmas story of Luke 2: THIS VERY DAY is born to you a saviour. This saying of the angel in Luke gathers up the wide and colourful range of Old Testament statements on salvation and destruction and beams them in one light on the TODAY! of Jesus' appearance. Matt. 11:5ff. marks the dawn of the Kingdom of God with Jesus' reference to the blind seeing, the lame walking, the lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing and the preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven to the poor - and to the rich as well, only they are affected differently by this proclamation.

Starting with Easter and ever since then, the Christian community has not simply carried on Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It has linked that proclamation - indissolubly - to the event of Jesus' coming, to his name and to the stages of his way to the Cross. The early church can indeed

accept four versions of the story of Jesus Christ and use a variety of terms to describe salvation. But the four Gospels are undeniably related to one and the same person and his unmistakable career; and early Christianity does not know salvation in the plural. It believes and confesses not only that the God of the Old Testament has revealed Himself fully in the history of Jesus Christ, but also that this God has committed Himself definitively in this history. To Christians the world can no longer seem wholly devoid of salvation. The Kingdom of God, for the coming of which the Christian community prays in the Lord's Prayer, has after all appeared once and for all in Jesus Christ. That is the substance of the Gospel.

The emphasis placed on Jesus Christ's coming once and for all (ephapax in Romans 6:10 and Hebrews 10:10) has had a lasting effect not only on Christianity but also on the European view of the world. If we are to talk about a 'Christianizing' of European civilization at all, this is perhaps where it is easiest to grasp. The uniqueness and unrepeatable nature of everything historical still shapes the everyday consciousness of our society even in its post-Christian era.

At the same time we have to admit that European society not only in its so-called Christian but also in its post-Christian period has interpreted the "TODAY!" of the Christmas story in line with its own socio-political interests and has related this "TODAY" to the 'Christian' character of its civilization or to the achievements of modern society, not to the humiliation of God on Jesus' path to the Cross. As a result, the messianism of European societies has become the apocalypse of the world. "If the West does not cease dominating the Third World, there is no chance of salvation", wrote Rubem Alves as early as 1973, reflecting on the CWME conference in

Bangkok. Hence he saw mission entering into an apocalyptic era - a godless age without salvation - "unless", he went on, "the church can prove itself to be a sustaining and saving community in its powerlessness" (cf. Alves, Bangkok Report (German version) 241-246. Quotations on 243 and 245).

It is increasingly difficult to speak to salvation.

The New Testament expects us to accept the fact that the Christmas story holds once and for all - with two results. First, we are not living in an age devoid of salvation. Secondly, salvation is not a human project: life is granted to faith and cannot be countermanded even by the reality of death. Such faith - now representing what is meant by that hackneyed term "salvation" - can neither be, nor become, something effected by human beings, any more than happiness or trust. This faith is pure grace and favour. For most of my contemporaries, however, this is the very sense of the term salvation - the sense created by Christian tradition - that has almost completely faded away, at least in my context.

Modern people want to be considered doers. The world can be changed and they charge themselves and others both with responsibility for the present predicament of the world and for finding themselves and preserving the integrity of the world. As it fades, the meaning of the word "salvation" has been transferred to other words such as "happiness", "wholeness", "self-fulfilment", "harmony with nature", but also to phrases like "justice, peace and the integrity of creation" - all of them words addressed to human beings as responsible agents, but calling for more than human beings can achieve by their own strength.

How can we ease the tension on the one hand between the messianic quality of Jesus and the messianic awareness modern people have of their freedom, and the tension on the other hand between salvation as something already given and the human share in responsibility for what becomes of humanity itself and of the world?

According to the proposal Sauter and others made years ago, and as is becoming increasingly accepted in ecumenical discussion today, this can be achieved only by relinquishing standard Protestant ideas about the Holy Spirit being exclusively tied to the Word - going into action pre-eminently on Sundays between 10 and 11 a.m. - and by considering that God expects us to believe that He is more generally present today as Holy Spirit (Anna Marie Aagaard). We certainly may not and should not assume that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, somewhat like a cosmic principle, nor should we see the Spirit at work in everything that happens. In this view, God continues the trial of Jesus, and has done so since Ascension and Pentecost, before a "hidden public". He makes Himself "known" by His actions. He hears the cry of His people as He heard the cry of His Son (Mark 15:34; Hebrews 2:7). He perpetuates the way of the Cross.

Has God not been bold enough already in the history of Jesus by turning upside down our idea of His creative omnipotence? He trusts His future to this man from Nazareth, who for his part seemed to have gambled away the life he was living for God and for us. Nevertheless, God expects us to have faith that He has not lost the thread of Jesus' life through what happened in his death. The "Lord is risen" means that Jesus' life with God cannot be negated. What does this mean for us? There are three parts to the answer.

First, the powers of death have already been stripped of their authority. The second part of the answer can only be experienced in the discipleship to which he called "the multitude with his disciples". The answer to this call is living the life of repentance. It is the path of the Cross trodden by Jesus: For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it (Mark 8:34ff).

Finally, the third part of the answer will be given when this world is taken up into the Kingdom of God. Until then we hope against hope (cf. Romans 4:17f.).

In this interim period we are allowed to hear his story and also to test whether the stories of our own experiences are embraced in that record. Is it not true that in this picture of Jesus' life with God and for God we can recognize the saving destiny of us all? Is it not also true that we have all fatefully and guiltily lost the image God made of us and will make again? Thus it is not simply from our experience that we determine what salvation or destruction might be, but from the Word which, as Luther has told us, Jesus Christ is. The Word shifts our experiences into the light of His truth.

We are also allowed in this age to tell the story of Jesus and see what happens then. He allows us to take part in his history - not in a messianic or proselytizing way but by enduring his hiddenness. How should we recognize and confess the presence of God? Even today, God limits His presence to the power of faith, hope and love. But does that mean, then, that we should perceive God everywhere? I don't think so. We are to perceive and confess the God of Jesus Christ where people themselves see that their own experience of love, and their own paths to Calvary, have a place

within the history of Jesus. They confess God where God lets Himself be known to them as the Holy, life-creating Spirit. We are all meant to join in and confess that the God of Jesus Christ calls into existence the things that do not exist and gives life to the dead (1 Cor. 12:3; Romans 4:17). God vindicates the truth of His name in the community of followers who have taken up His Cross. If this is true, then the Christmas card from Korea is closer to the Gospel.

In the light of the Cross there is no cause to take anything away from the words of Peter's confession before the council: "...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Such statements remain tied to the language and the situation of confession. If we confess that the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ is the exclusiveness of the road He walked, it is clear that such a confession cannot be detached from the context of "cross - vindication by God - confession", and translated into absolute claims to hegemony by churches or theological systems.

The story of Jesus' road of the Cross remains an individual history. As such it is told everywhere and evinces a tremendous power to overcome emotional, social, cultural and political barriers and to establish itself in new contexts. No absolute claim can be fabricated from this. And what good would it do, anyway? The idea that all people everywhere live on the basis of God's concern for them, and that this concern is manifested in the blessing of their lives, is not thereby called into question, but emphatically vindicated.

Conclusions for dialogue and mission in a multi-faith context

My conclusions and suggestions for discussion remain close to the social

context from which I have been reporting. I hope nonetheless that enough suggestions will emerge for us to exchange in a multi-religious context our respective experiences of salvation and destruction, and perhaps even to link them together. I do not find it easy to evaluate the co-existence, the communality and conflicts of the various religions from the standpoint of mission and dialogue and therefore I am offering only a few suggestions for discussion.

Who is talking about salvation and destruction - and in what way?

The dominant theme in this context is of course the life of the people, their survival and their happiness.

The religious traditions represented in this context mostly adopt different positions on this matter. My questions are:

- How is the theme of salvation/destruction articulated in your context?
- Who is talking where with whom? Who is in conflict with whom regarding salvation and its opposite?
- How does the institutional church take into account the collages created by ordinary people on the theme of a "successful life" or "images of what is truly human"?

Are the various religions capable of making a tangible contribution to a socio-ethical consensus?

One tends to expect that religions living alongside each other in one particular context will contribute something together to common life and survival. The overall situation requires them to set aside claims to hegemony with religious trimmings. I think this also holds true on a global scale. Cooperation on a social-ethical project therefore would seem essential.

But Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Irian Jaya (West Irian) or even Fiji show that it might scarcely be any easier to achieve a viable working relationship in this field than to exchange abstract metaphysical ideas. My questions are:

- Does an inter-religious project for social ethics seem necessary and promising? Who would like to take part in such a project in your context?
- Do you have any ideas concerning forums and institutional connections that could be used as a framework for such a project in your context?

Where in practice does inter-religious encounter take place?

The difficulty that religions co-exist, interact and conflict makes me cautious. "Dialogue" is too narrow a term to cover the range of these relations, and the term "mission" is burdened by its colonial past.

Naturally everyone claims to be in favour of "dialogue" and "mission". But there is actually very little interest in either one of them. Why?

In the past, dialogue was mostly conducted in very restricted circles of religious intellectuals, without much grassroots support. The real reason is not just connected with the themes and levels of previous dialogues but with the fact that religious groups are primarily concerned with maintaining their own position and increasing their membership.

People conduct their lives in such a way that processes of mutual influence and isolation occur, and mission and dialogue might be said to be constantly taking place. Nevertheless, many people are afraid of mission and see it as a project which wants to encroach

and refuses to respect the fact that people want to find their own answers to problems and sometimes already have.

The word "encounter" covers something broader than the popular understanding of mission and dialogue. Encounter needs platforms for discussion, and structures in which it can take place. My question is:

- If it is true that the organized religions to a large extent ignore one another, should this be changed and if so, to what purpose?

"Reciprocal witness"

We should not make unrealistic demands on projects for interreligious dialogue. But the following question does suggest itself: would not joint efforts on problems relating to social ethics also make it necessary to define more clearly the respective views of salvation and destruction - not only within the context of a single region but also in the process of mediation among various contexts?

From our work in the ecumenical movement we know how difficult it is to mediate experiences from different contexts. Interreligious efforts will no doubt be even more difficult.

Even if we can never enter fully into the plausibility structure of another context or tradition, we should at least be able to cross the threshold of another religious explanation of the world and see what is going on, to listen - and perhaps even to go some distance towards reconstructing its logic. Comprehension and witness mutually condition each other - as do dialogue and mission.

Different stories create different identities, as we have said. One would like to think that these identities are open towards the future, and it is possible that they

are moving in each other's direction. But perhaps this is not so; religions may change but nevertheless retain their very disparate identities.

My final question is:

- How do we account for our views of where and when the names of God validate themselves?

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INTRODUCING THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



Marlin VanElderen

Marlin VanElderen

INTRODUCING THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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CHRISTIAN-MARXIST DIALOGUE: CRISIS OR KAIROS?

Hans Ucko

A report from Britain spells it out clearly: "In Britain, the Communist Party of Great Britain's membership is under 5,500; that of the other Marxist parties is smaller still. The weekly *7 Days* closed a few weeks ago; *World Marxist Review* has also closed. More drastically, the CPGB will hold a special congress in March 1991 to consider dissolving itself, or transforming itself into a 'network' rather than a party".¹

Written in big letters on what is left of the Berlin Wall I read "And the wall came tumbling down". It wasn't only the wall which had collapsed. An entire political system crumbled. And as someone in the GDR (German Democratic Republic) said: "Suddenly there are no Marxists left. They vanished into thin air. As it now stands it seems we never had any Marxists here".

Do these events in Eastern Europe signify the end of Marxism? Many would definitely say so. There was a certain gloating by many people as they witnessed the exodus of thousands of young East Germans from the GDR to the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), and there were those who unabashedly pronounced the manifest victory of capitalism over an impotent Marxism. There was glee in the air, as the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, And rightly so. The most atrocious symbol of imprisonment of an entire people had suddenly crumbled. But there were also those who could hardly conceal their delight at what they saw as capitalism conquering the world.

Is the crumbling of state socialist systems actually a liberation for Marxist philosophy? Could the events in Eastern Europe indeed imply a liberation from a Babylonian captivity, where the Marxist idea or vision couched in state socialism had been a prisoner?

In that case one could surely make a comparison with the gospel of the church. The gospel has run and still runs the risk of being imprisoned when the church is part and parcel of the state apparatus.

Are then the events in Eastern Europe actually to be welcomed by Marxists as the beginning of something new? In a recent interview President Gorbachev said: "What I value in Marxist theory is the idea of constant movement and development, and also its rigorous respect for the truth... The Stalinist model of socialism should not be confused with true socialist theory. As we dismantle the Stalinist system, we are not retreating from socialism but are moving toward it".²

It is no secret that those who from a Christian perspective have been active in various forms of Christian-Marxist dialogue, today almost run the risk of being frowned upon or even ridiculed. They would most probably receive the advice that they let the dead bury their own dead. This dialogue has never been a mass movement, neither in the church nor among Marxists. There are of

course many reasons for this rather marginal phenomenon called Christian-Marxist dialogue. The mere fact that Marx had described religion "as the opium of the people" had of course initiated the estrangement of Christians from Marxist philosophy. No one really bothered to see that Marx actually in the same sentence called religion "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions."³ But the divide between Christians and Marxists runs of course deeper than a mere quotation. There is a very long and tragic history of persecution and humiliation of the church in Marxist societies.

Today Christians and Marxists in Europe face an entirely new situation. Marxists have had to relinquish power. There is no state apparatus to protect them. If one is a Marxist today, one has to stand on one's own feet. Job opportunities are at this time scarce for professing Marxists in Poland and in the GDR. Instead there are more than 10 pastors in the present government of the GDR.

This new situation finds Christian-Marxist dialogue at the crossroads. It looks like reversed roles for Christians and Marxists. Christians seem to have the upper hand. Is it so? Christians and Marxists are, however, in spite of the transformation of Eastern Europe both minorities without power. Christians in Eastern Europe have for a long time known that they were a minority. Marxists have until now been able to conceal from themselves that Marxism never was the movement of the masses.

This has bearing upon the Christian-Marxist encounter. Are the new realities in Eastern Europe a death-blow to a Christian-Marxist dialogue, a plain good-bye to what actually was always in the margin of both Christian and Marxist commitments?

Or are the events to be welcomed as a "kairos", a beginning of something new and challenging, a possibility for Marxist philosophy to be an equal partner with those Christians who are open to a dialogue with them?

At a meeting arranged by the Evangelische Akademie Berlin-Brandenburg in East Berlin in April, Marxists and Christians met in the wake of the tumultuous events of the last six months. The wall was no more. Or rather, what remained of the wall was more of a ruin than of a wall. It had big holes to it. Small pieces or big chunks of it were sold to the many tourists.

There had been elections in March. These elections confirmed that Marxism had suffered an enormous defeat. Not even the rather moderate Social-Democrats had gained the support they had hoped for. The votes went in another direction. Commentators said that East Germans had voted with their stomachs, their empty stomachs. This was an allusion to what had been said about those East Germans, who the year before had embarked upon a mass exodus from the GDR. They, it was said, voted with their feet.

In November 1989 there had been optimism and hopefulness about a real change. The wall had crumbled. The people had launched a revolution. The time had finally come for a socialism with a human face, a revival of those days, when Alexander Dubček in Prague in 1968 had inspired people to believe that such a thing was possible. But the elections demonstrated that "socialism is no

goal anymore. People just don't want to hear about socialism with a human face. That is gone."⁴

There was disappointment about the sudden shift in the GDR. The revolution of November 1989 transformed itself into a speedy thrust for reunion with the FRG. Too fast for many. At a demonstration in Dresden one could read on one of the banners: "Vom Stalinismus gleich in den Kapitalismus - ohne mich!" (From Stalinism straight into Capitalism - not I!). "The depressive state of mind of East Germans and the victorious attitude of leading figures on the West German commercial and political scene are expected to result in the quick integration of the GDR into the political and economic model of the Federal Republic of Germany".⁵

The East German poet Wolf Biermann writes almost pathetically: "There are only two minorities who would still be interested in a socialist experiment: yesterday's rulers and their preferred victims of yesterday: left-leaning Christians and radical Leftists".⁶

I doubt if there were any former rulers among those who participated in the Christian-Marxist dialogue in the Stephanus-Stiftung in Berlin-Weissensee. But there were Christians and Marxists who were trying to understand what had happened in their country. These were people who, in a way, seemed to share what Wolf Biermann says in the following way: "I can't extinguish in myself the dream of a more just society".⁷ These were people who seemed to be mourning together a deceased vision of society. Here at this point and time the dialogue between Christians and Marxists seemed to function as a place for mourning together something which had been lost.

But "dialogue (also) means challenge. The differences are not ironed out, but much more clearly defined. Much is achieved because we are not concerned here with a mutual ignoring, but rather with a mutual challenge in the form of questions."⁸

The Marxists were thus challenged to share their interpretation of what had gone wrong in the GDR. One of them said in a very moving and heart-rending way: "It is evident that the era of ideologies is now dead and together with it ideology itself, since ideology became identical with opportune lies and distortions of truth and was made to serve a misinterpretation of reality. Ideology developed into an arrogant instrument for the scientific world approach. It became equivalent with illusion and convicted you to a certain loss of reality. Ideology was made into an erroneous manual on how to use reality, served by a priestly caste, installed by the state. This ideology served the state without any critique or analysis. There was no utopia in the GDR. And where there is no utopia, there is no critique or analysis. One could say that a hostility to utopia destroyed us here in the GDR. And the state socialist system could not tolerate anything which smelled of utopia". He continued: "We have to engage in self-criticism, not only Marxists but also the church. Otherwise there can be no dialogue. Because the blind can hardly help the lame. We have to heal our wounds and we have to learn how to really enter into dialogue. It is my experience that Christians and Marxists have mostly intersected, but rarely met. It seems like Marx discovered the individual at the same time as the church discovered the community. They never really encountered each other. Today there are possibilities. But as Christians

have to learn how to spell their way through the word 'Inquisition,' we as Marxists must learn how to spell the word 'Stalinism'."

There was another point of entry for a Christian-Marxist dialogue from one of the other Marxist participants. It concerned the Christian claim that humankind is created in the image of God. "Isn't this deifying of man an escape from facing the real problems of the world, turning a blind eye before the starving masses? A less escapist point of departure would be to emphasize human dignity and human rights. Committing one's life to striving for this goal would be to give primacy to the *humanum*, a well founded tradition in the Socialist movement. Humankind has to assert that it is master over its own destiny. This would make us realize that there is no other way than the way of our own hands and our own work and that alms are but a momentary relief. We thus need a new revolution, a human revolution, where we discuss which liberties we could voluntarily do without, if only for the sake of *humanum*. It is clear to me that neither socialism nor capitalism has the answer. Such a revolution would bring us closer to the enigma we face together: humankind. Ernst Bloch said it in these intriguing words: "**Das was der Mensch ist, dass wissen wir noch nicht**" (that what man is, is still unknown to us). Theologians talk about *Deus absconditus*. I would prefer to say that we are still looking for *Homo absconditus*, the unknown humankind".

Christian-Marxist dialogue is faced with a major crisis as to its mere survival. There are those who today see no reason whatsoever for continuing such a dialogue. Marxism is a thing of the past. It has lost out in Eastern Europe and it will not be long before this outdated philosophical dinosaur will give up the ghost. It is already gasping for breath. Whether such a prophecy proves to be true remains to be seen. It is probably true that Marxism will not be able to remain uninfluenced by what has happened in Eastern Europe. As Christians we should however not yield to temptation and join the choir of malicious pleasure, rejoicing in the defeat of Marxism. That is not our place. Neither is it our place to assume the role of someone who paternalistically behaves as if he had all the answers. We don't. As Marxists will most likely have to, we as Christians already in the pristine church have had to revise our vision: our hope of the imminent *parousia*, which failed to materialize as early as the disciples thought it would. "All things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" (2 Peter 3,3). This was a setback to the young church and a theological revision was called for. It is of course still a problem for the church that the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed and which was to install peace among the nations, turned out to be more of a long-range vision and hope, and meanwhile the church had to settle with ...the church!

Having said this it is not difficult to see that Christians and Marxists in a way, albeit not the same, have to be open for revision and reorientation. This is not entirely a disadvantage. Christians and Marxists may have learned or will learn the danger of being too absolute in theology or doctrine. Plurality is one way of saying that one is still learning and assimilating impressions and experiences. Christians and Marxists in the West will, in dialogue, learn that one can, at one and the same time, be both a Marxist and a Christian. Such is the example from South Africa, the Philippines and Latin America. Christians and Marxists may in dialogue discover that their common Judeo-Christian understanding of dominion over the earth is challenged by the

ecological crisis. They may in dialogue discover the experiences of other traditions, of a Buddhist peace movement or of a Taoist *wu-wei* relation to nature.

Marxists will remain as a corrective to the Christian temptation to promise "pie in the sky bye and bye". They will remind Christians that the goal is not yet achieved and that not everything is fulfilled. Marxists will insist that man has come of age and should not be reduced to a mere receiver of a consummate creation.

Christians on the other hand will remain as a corrective to Marxist materialism and insist upon a spirituality which can never without back-lash be replaced, substituted or satiated. The Marxist experiment in atheism proved to be a vain enterprise. Marxists should not forget what Marx himself said: "So lange die Menschen denken, denken sie religiös" (as long as humankind reflects, it reflects religiously). And even if we set all prisoners free, fed all the hungry, clothed all the naked, healed all the wounds, and banned all the wars, we would still always hear the voice within us: "Who am I? From where do I come and where do I go?" This voice is a voice of spirituality, which keeps on asking us if we are not more than ashes. Someone has rightly called it "ein ozeanisches Gefühl" (an ocean-like feeling).

Christians and Marxists have more than their humanity in common. They are both committed to building a new world. They each have a vision, one is a vision where there is peace and justice and equality among humankind; the other is also a vision where there is peace and justice and equality among humankind, but this vision cannot be separated from the experience of the holy and the sacred. There are vast differences between Christians and Marxists, but this they have in common: the experience and awareness that without a vision the people perish.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Report from United Reformed Church, U.K.: Gethyn Rhys, Dialogue with Marxism 1989.
- 2 TIME Magazine No.23, June 4, 1990.
- 3 "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie", Marx/Engels Werke, Bd.1, S.378.
- 4 Wolf Biermann: Aus den Vogeleiern kriechen Krokodile, Das Magazin 14/90 p.67-75.
- 5 Theologians look at ethics and social change in Europe, Lutheran World Information 18/90 p.11.
- 6 Wolf Biermann: see above.
- 7 ibid.
- 8 Lochman, J.M.: Encountering Marx: Bonds and Barriers between Christians and Marxists (Christian Journals, Belfast, 1977) p.43.

CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST ENCOUNTERS: MISSION AND DIALOGUE IN JAPAN

Siegfried Finkbeiner

In 1549 the Spanish Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima on a Chinese pirate junk. Xavier was one of the founding members of the Jesuit Order and had been given the task of planting the Gospel in Japan.

In one of his letters to Rome Xavier reported that the Lutheran heresy had already spread in Japan. He was referring to Jodo-Buddhism, Buddhist sects solely relying on the saving power of Amida Buddha. These sects had numerous followers among farmers and craftsmen in the country.

Xavier held the Japanese people in very high esteem. Among the people he had encountered so far he admired this people the most, surpassing even the Spaniards. Nevertheless it was his task to convert the Japanese people to the Roman Catholic faith.

It was the era of counter-reformation in Europe. According to the Jesuits all Protestants were nothing but heretics and deserters from the one Church. Therefore, as soon as Xavier met Jodo-Buddhism he found it more upsetting than interesting. In the same vein his appreciation of the indigenous religions of Japan was low. In spite of his love of the people, as far as their religion was concerned it became a question of truth versus falsehood, true religion versus idolatry.

Xavier was indeed zealous in his attempt to convert the Japanese. No effort was spared in order to understand the customs and rituals which he met. He explicitly stipulated that all missionaries should refrain from

eating fish and meat, since such was the custom among the Buddhist monks. In spite of such concessions the Jesuit missionary's method aimed at reacting the upper strata of society. By means of convincing arguments he thought the daimyos and other leaders, including the Buddhist and Shinto clergy, would readily be brought to understand and accept the superiority of the Christian religion. They would then realize the poverty of their own beliefs. The fact that the country was split into competing and warring chieftains favoured the Jesuit missionary cause.

Having arrived in Kagoshima, Xavier became acquainted with a certain Nenjitsu, the abbot of a Zen monastery, whom Xavier met several times. But dogmatic apologetics and missionary zeal are mental attitudes which are very far from the Zen Buddhist way. Perhaps the abbot responded to the provocative questions of Xavier by means of engaging in an unusually cryptic "dialogue". When taken through the meditation hall Xavier noticed the monks sitting motionless on the floor. No doubt impressed by their concentration and calm he asked his guide what the monks were doing here. The old abbot answered smiling:

Some of them are counting up how much they received during the past months from their faithful; others are thinking about where they can obtain better clothes and treatment for their persons; others are thinking about their recreations and their amusements; in short, none of them are thinking about anything that has any meaning at all.¹

Xavier took this answer seriously and drew certain conclusions concerning the spiritual depth of the Buddhist training of monks. The ironical twist of the response was entirely lost. The Zen master was simply not interested in an exchange of doctrinal views. Why deal with limited concepts, words, and letters? The practice of zazen aims at a level of understanding which is transcendent and beyond words. But, on the other hand, the abbot told the truth. In Zen there is no particular object to think of. Rather the aim is to dissolve all conceptual structures and enter the detached state of emptiness. During this process numerous disturbing thoughts pop up out of the unconscious. It was such bypassing ideas that the Zen master was hinting at in his answer to Xavier.

Xavier could not understand the meaning of Zen. He was a product of his own background, convinced of the superiority of Christian dogmatics. There are numerous incidents proving his failure to understand Buddhism. One reason was also the different ways of communication. An extract from one of Xavier's letters written to Goa speaks for itself;

He is called Ninjitsu, which means 'Heart of Truth' in the language of Japan. He is like a bishop among them, and if he were to conform to his name, he would be blessed. In the many conversations which we had, I found him doubtful and unable to decide whether our soul is immortal or whether it dies together with the body; sometimes he agreed with me, and at other times he did not. I am afraid that the other scholars are of the same mind.²

Gradually the Christian missionary work in Japan gained a considerable following. Within a few decades parts of southwest Japan became Christian. But the interrelationship with the colonial policy of European naval

powers aroused a growing suspicion among the powerful daimyos in Japan. In the end Christianity was banned and its followers persecuted. All foreigners were expelled and the country was closed for two hundred years. Japan was never colonised by European powers. During the ensuing Tokugawa era (1600-1867) Japanese culture could develop independently.

Since the 1860's Japan has been gradually transformed through the influx of Western science, technology and trade. Churches were established and evangelizing started again. Missionaries from abroad took up residence in the country.

One of these missionaries was Wilhelm Gundert who came to Japan in 1906. His grandfather, Hermann Gundert, had worked as a missionary in India and became a renowned linguist. Following in his footsteps Wilhelm spent more than thirty years in Japan and became one of the most insightful experts on the spiritual world of East Asia, particularly Chinese and Japanese literature and Buddhism.

No doubt Gundert was influenced by his grandfather, but also his background in the pietism of Swabia made him eminently equipped to value and to understand the religious depth of Buddhism. Already during his first sojourn in Japan Gundert realized that the first prerequisite for missionaries was their own conversion. He wrote: It became clear to me that my views on mission in Japan were imports, more or less useless, brimming with inbuilt feelings of superiority. A foreigner in this country will have to serve and offer assistance wherever and whenever it is called for.³ True to such a conviction Gundert, accompanied by his wife and their one year old son, went to a far off village and lived with the Japanese according to their ways and customs. Since he was entirely involved as a person, and due to the

pressures and challenges there, his understanding of Japan increased. Such a penetrating experience shines through between the lines in Gundert's later works on Eastern culture and religion. Besides "Japanische Religionsgeschichte" (History of Japanese Religions) his most important work is the translation and commentary of Bi-yän-lu, an early 12th century primer on Chinese Ch'an (Japanese: Zen) Buddhism, better known in the English-speaking world as "The Blue Cliff Records". In this publication we sense a genuine and congenial appreciation of the Chinese and Japanese way of expressing itself in word and spirit. No doubt Gundert was way before his time. He was a pioneer of interreligious dialogue.

In spite of his familiarity with Buddhism Gundert remained true to his own roots, the Pietism of Swabia. Thus in Bi-yän-lu we find references to Paul Gerhard Tersteegen, both of whom in their hymns employed images and symbols of God which we also find in Buddhism used to express the universality of the Buddha. Listen to his description of Zen Buddhism in the introduction to the first volume of the Bi-yän-lu: They are not Christians, yet, not even Deists. But when I listen intensively to their spirit I must confess that according to my understanding of Christianity these persons have God - even if they would reject such a name and mercilessly tear into pieces any definition of God.⁴

It is clear that Xavier and Gundert approached Buddhism in very different ways. Xavier always seems to have judged the foreign religions using Christian tradition as a normative doctrine. Thus he was unable to penetrate to the core of Buddhism. Gundert approached Buddhism from the very centre of his Christian faith and thus he affirmed their common source. Surely Gundert testified to more than

his own experience. He knew that there were many Christians who had encountered Buddhism from within.

Having quoted Tersteegen's hymn, "Let my heart soar like an eagle above and let me live in you alone", Gundert elaborates further on this theme in the second part of Bi-yän-lu. He dwells particularly with the meaning of the word "above" ("überwärts"):

Here is a most important point where Christianity and Buddhism coincide. Emerging from an entirely different milieu and depending on wholly indigenous preconditions an understanding of life spread from India to East Asia. This understanding ultimately agrees with that which is based on the Old Testament and endorsed by Jesus. Indeed each tradition has its own unmistakable character. But they move side by side extending in the same direction. And since both are directed toward the Absolute, they will ultimately fall together like parallel lines do. It does not mean that they will come closer or coalesce while in time. Each one has its own charisma.⁵

I have quoted Gundert at some length since what he wrote in the 1960's, today is more relevant than ever before. However, Gundert is more or less unknown or forgotten. Still he must be considered as a pioneer of the Christian-Buddhist encounter. Let us bear in mind that his long and painstaking study of Buddhism and of the various religious traditions of the East in no way made him a follower of the Buddha. As stated above, his understanding of Christian faith was enhanced and deepened. He wrote:

Experience has proved that Christians who take a serious interest in Zen will strengthen and deepen in faith and love.⁶

Gundert's remarks suggest an approach

to the study of religion as it is practiced on the basis of a *philosophia perennis*. A number of scholars from different religious traditions have found that the study of religion must be undertaken in a worldwide context. *Philosophia perennis* is regarded as an absolute, divine Presence in the core of the great religious traditions, a Presence which is accessible by means of religious practice and experiential knowledge. The way leads through one or the other of the revealed Traditions by means of adhering to the holy scriptures, rites, and symbols which characterize each religion. According to the *philosophia perennis* the great religions have a common divine source and testify to a Divine revelation manifested in various forms. As the distance increases from the inner kernel of the religions we will encounter various manifestations of the Divine presence as mirrored in the multiplural historical and cultural contexts. On the other hand, closing the range to the common source the religions tend to coincide, to converge. We approach the realm of the unutterable, apophatic theology or *via negativa*, or as Gundert put it: Christianity and Buddhism both point towards "a beyond" ("überwärts"). This is the reason why Gundert found it legitimate to state that the Zen Buddhists have God, even if they do not want to have anything to do with a personalistic concept of God.

The *philosophia perennis* affirms the intrinsic value of each religious tradition, since each of them points towards a Transcendence which relativizes the varying religious forms. There is no pure Transcendence. Religious forms and expressions have a mediatory function. Thus in Gundert we find that he chose to express his deepest religious convictions by means of employing not Buddhist but Christian symbols.

It is doubtful that Gundert was familiar with the *philosophia perennis* tradition. He never refers to it in his books. But it is thought-provoking to notice that what is at stake is how to find a methodology for the study of religion which is true to its own subject. Both Gundert and representatives of the *philosophia perennis* found that a sheer historical-phenomenological approach was not enough. Students must themselves be empathetically and existentially involved with a tradition not of their own. Such a stance is only possible if it is nurtured by the transcendent tension within one's own tradition. A sensitivity for the Divine is an expression of faith. It allows the student better to evaluate and to assess the various forms and expressions of faith within humanity's common religious heritage.

The process demands keen sensitivity. It demands no less than getting into the skin of other people, walking in their shoes, looking at the world through their eyes and raising their questions, trying to understand the world and God as a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim or a Jew. It is a process of "passing over" and "coming back":

...a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time...It starts from the homeland of man's own religion, goes through the wonderland of other religions, and ends in the homeland of his own.⁷

It goes without saying that any Christian feeling of superiority or one-sided absolute-truth-claim is out of place. Nor is it viable to superimpose intrinsically Christian normative standards on the other religions. Here the *philosophia perennis* makes use of the concept of

the "relatively absolute". It might be helpful to use a metaphor: within our solar system the sun is the centre. She is the nurse and the protector of life, giving light, warmth and energy. But in the perspective of galactic space our sun is one among many suns, which might play similar roles within different solar systems. The awareness of other suns, however, in no way makes our sun cease to be our sun, the centre of our solar system, the giver of life to our world and the direct symbol of the Divine.

The issue of participation and identity looms in the background. Towards the end of his life this problem was a major preoccupation of Paul Tillich. After his encounter with Buddhism Tillich took a deep interest in the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. He developed structures contrasting the Kingdom of God with Nirvana, Love and Compassion, and suggested that each symbol necessarily embraces its own opposite in the process of teleological thrust where participation and identity cooperate.

The Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani is eminently familiar with a similar process which he has attempted to outline in his works:

I do not feel satisfied with any religion as it stands, and I feel the limitations of philosophy also. So, after much hesitation I made up my mind and have at present become a werdender Buddhist (a Buddhist in the making). One of the main motives for that decision was - strange as it sounds - that I could not enter into the faith of present-day Christianity and was nevertheless not able to reject Christianity. As for Christianity, I cannot become anything more than a werdender Christian (a Christian in the making)...For I cannot bring myself to consider Buddhism a false doctrine. When it comes to Buddhism, however, I can enter into Buddhism as a

werdend gewordener Buddhist (a Buddhist in the making who has found his home in Buddhism)...and from that standpoint I can, at the same time, be a werdender (not gewordener) Christian.⁸

Nishitani became a Buddhist, a "werdend Gewordener" follower of the Buddha. As such he has pursued his philosophical discipline in close relation and friendship with Western philosophers and theologians. Could he perhaps serve as an example for Western scholars?

In Buddhism Ultimate Reality is called sunyata and in Eastern religions the idea of Emptiness is of pivotal importance. Thus there seems to be a radical tension, perhaps no connection at all with the Archimedian point of Western thinking, namely, the concept of Being, Sein. But here many Western interpretations have missed the point. Buddhism is by far not nihilism, and not atheism. Sunyata as prativityasamutpada (dependent co-arising) is always thought of as a positive and dynamic force. This is particularly the case in the Mahayana tradition (China, Tibet, Korea, Japan). It is the basic foundation of Reality in its manifold and changing manifestations. Every true Buddhist aspires to an awakening to and realization of such an insight. As Ultimate Reality it must be trans-personal since it encompasses all the worlds - visible and invisible. At the same time this highest principle is firmly rooted in each person and therefore in Buddhism there is no concept of God, and a doctrine of creation.

In the context of a philosophia perennis Wilhelm Gundert has pointed out that the most important similarities between the two religions concern the experience of transcendence. It is the enduring strength of Buddhism that it has handed down in many varying ways, all of which give expression to Ultimate Reality, a transcendent

perspective. There is an equivalent in Christology, the negative theology or the mystic tradition. But - with the exception of the Orthodox churches - such ways of understanding played a secondary role and were often regarded as subjectivistic and synergetic, sometimes even rejected as heretical (Meister Eckhart).

On the other hand this is the point where the main difference between Buddhism and Christianity becomes clear. Bonhoeffer's "Beten und Tun des Gerechten" (Prayer and Righteous Action) may serve to distinguish them. If we interpret "beten" (prayer) in a wider sense Buddhism has always emphasized this aspect while the latter pole has been most important in Christianity. Listen to Gundert's comments in this context:

Both (Christianity and Buddhism) have their own 'charisma'. In the Christian community love reigns. In Buddhism love plays a secondary role as pity or compassion. It is set in motion only when absolute union is dissolved into plurality, when subject and object come apart, when an 'I' becomes aware of a distinct 'you'. According to Buddha's own experience, Buddha-hood starts with the notion of unity and only then the attention turns to the world of plurality, our fellow beings, reality as such. Therefore, the Buddhists know more about silent meditation and the depths of quietude that we do. And within Buddhism it is the followers of Bodhidharma, i.e. Zen, who have concentrated on this central theme more than any other sect.

Yet, today is the time for sharing like never before. Christians and Buddhists have only begun to get to know each other. The agenda is wide open. The most important thing is the mutuality of such an encounter.⁹

So far we have looked at the Buddhist-Christian encounter mainly from a Western perspective. It is time to

listen to a representative of Japanese spirituality, to a person eminently equipped for this task: Katsumi Takizawa (1909-84). Takizawa was a Buddhist student of Kitaro Nishida, founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. In 1933 he went to Germany to pursue his studies. Nishida insisted that he should study with Karl Barth. In 1958 he was baptized in Japan.

These brief biographical facts indicate that Takizawa was a person on the boundary between East and West, between Buddhism and Japanese culture and Western theology and philosophy. Thus he was probably the first Japanese theologian who did not restrict himself to comparative studies between Christianity and Buddhism in the capacity of a historian of religion. First of all he was a theologian. So he encouraged Japanese theologians to shake off the yoke of "the German captivity", to use an expression of one of his colleagues.

Takizawa was inspired by Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, a student of Nishida and by Karl Barth. Perhaps he was struck by Karl Barth's elaboration of Jodo-Buddhism (in Kirchliche Dogmatik, KD 1,2 pp 372-77). Barth talked about the Jodo-shu as the closest, most extensive and thought-provoking "heathen parallel to Christianity". From such a basic Takizawa developed an emerging starting point for a Japanese theology. Thereby he makes a distinction between a primary and a secondary contact between God and humankind. The primary contact he calls the "urfaktum" (primary fact), Immanuel, "God with us". This event is God's own work and sustains all people whether they are Christians or not. Jesus of Nazareth and also the Buddha, have acknowledged and lived out this primary contact in their lives. God works through these two and through their followers who have responded to the "Urfaktum" and a second level of contact is established between God and humankind.

Christianity and Buddhism share the primary fact, but present different expressions as far as the second contacts are concerned.

Whether Takizawa has interpreted Barth correctly or not is one thing. By means of employing the Oriental concept of Dharma, Takizawa added a wider dimension to Western theology as he understood it in its Barthian guise. Hear what Takizawa says in his book: *Reflexionen über die universale Grundlage von Buddhismus und Christentum*:

Today there are far too many 'Christian' theologians who fear that Christianity is in danger of losing its relevance and importance, its own distinct profile and necessity. Such a view is superfluous...Indeed, what is important is nothing but the Gospel of God (das Evangelium Gottes), preached by Jesus himself, the only Word of God. This is the absolute point of contact between God and humankind. For us human beings there is nothing to add, nothing to disregard. The living Word operates. Faith is our response. Only when we have seen this will or faith, our testimony, indeed, Christianity as such, become authentically open, light and strong. Thus we rejoice in our hearts when finding that there are other true religions besides Christianity. Then we remember Jesus' word: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2), and we realize that these words refer not only to the Christian Church but also to the Buddhist congregation.¹⁰

In Takizawa's view the central insight of Christian faith does not limit the horizon to Christendom, but on the contrary it opens our perspective of the living truth within other religious traditions.

Such a perspective has been

substantiated by Gundert's exposure to a Japanese context and also by the *philosophia perennis*. In summing up, this calls for some reflections on concepts like "mission" and "dialogue". The long history of Christian missions, the manifold theories and debates, not the least during the 20th century, can not be dealt with in this paper. Perhaps briefly stated one could say that in encountering Japanese religions Xavier, and many missionaries following in his footsteps, were firmly steeped in a rigid confrontational position: "we" are Christians; "they" are non-Christians. "We" know the way to salvation; "they" do not have such a knowledge. This conviction has started to break up during the last ten years or so. We are involved in a changing process. The world is becoming one. The information available makes us aware of developments and crisis situations almost at once. There are some reasons for the ongoing change of perceptions.

But it seems to me that the experience of the missionaries is most important. I am thinking of those who worked for a long time in the midst of a foreign culture and religion, and the ways in which such an involvement led to a deeper understanding of one's own participation in one of the religions of the world. Let me mention persons like Karl-Ludwig Reichelt, Richard Wilhelm, Wilhelm Gundert and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. With these persons, and many others as well, we realize that in encountering other religious traditions the "we"-horizon has widened. No longer can it be restricted to the Christian tradition only. Wilfred Cantwell Smith elaborates on the concepts of "mission" and "dialogue" in an article "mission, dialogue and God's will for us", (*IRM*, July 1988, No. 307). He calls for a worldwide context and tries to discern what is God's will for us today. Mission remains the most urgent task of the churches, and must be re-thought.

Only as we learn to see God's activity in other movements and other communities shall we serve Him well in and through our own. The future of the Christian mission turns on our learning to see God's mission in the Church as one part of His whole mission to mankind.¹¹

During the last centuries the concept of "mission" was usually understood in a one-directional sense leading to the "we-they" confrontational structures mentioned above. The "dialogue issue" changed the situation. The two concepts stand side by side in a dynamic tension, a tension sometimes causing anguish and frustration. The reason is that the churches and theology are in the midst of a comprehensive paradigm change. We live in a time of upheaval even realizing that the "we-they" structure of confrontation must be broken down. The concept of "dialogue" becomes central. It suggests various ways of encountering other religions leaving behind prejudices concerning the superiority of one's own tradition.

In this sense the dialogue is first of all the obligation of the individual. A person of "passing over" is needed in order to come to know the other religion sympathetically and in order to walk at least for a while in the shoes of its followers. We have already dealt with the two-way approach. What is important to underline is that religious dialogue in itself has religious significance being part of the practice of religion. It is far more than the exchange of doctrinal statements and intellectual stances. A dialogical bent is nurtured by a deep personal religious experience involving an urge to welcome strangers and make them honoured guests.

Actually, the concept of "dialogue" is somewhat misleading, smacking of confrontation as it does. It is not a

confrontational encounter between different parties, different loyalties. Such statements are premature. They tend to ignore the common and transcendent origin of the religions. A fruitful encounter requires common concerns and the recognition of a universal openness.

On the other hand the concept of "dialogue" is useful at a preparatory stage. Somehow we need to meet, and we need tools serving as pointers in order eventually to rediscover a new synthetic unity. But it is a unity in variety. The aim of interreligious dialogue is not to reduce the colours of the Divine rainbow which arches over all humanity. No one wishes to paint in one colour only. The various "charismas" (W.Gundert) must be acknowledged and respected as enhancing the deepening and widening of the human horizon.

Further, staying with the image of the rainbow, dialogue must sometimes even be extended into triologue or even tetralogue. For example, a study of Japanese Buddhism, particularly Zen, would require insights into Taoism with its decisive connections and influences on Chinese Buddhism, the bedrock of Japanese Buddhism.

For the time being both concepts - "mission" and "dialogue" - will stand side by side during the era of transition. "Mission" remains the task of the Church including the ongoing need to interpret and visualize the Gospel in a changing world. "Dialogue" is the expression of a conviction that God is at work not only within the Christian churches. Thus we wish to cooperate and to share in depth with other religious traditions.

I have tried to outline a few examples of how "mission" and "dialogue" have been understood in a Japanese context. A systematic exposition is available within the spectrum of *philosophia*

perennis, particularly in Fritjof Schuons' book *The Transcendent Unity of the Religions*. Personally I have found that the suggestions offered in a *philosophia perennis* perspective deserve to be taken seriously by all who are interested in the religious significance of the study of religion.

The global extension and outreach vibrate within such a study. W.C. Smith talks about "the chances" we have, but also about "our task and our privilege" to be involved in such an agenda:

My conclusion, then, is that a new day dawned in the world's religious history. It is a day in which it has become, for the first time ever, possible - and divinely imperative - for Christians to join Christianly, joyously, with delight, in endeavouring to build in collaboration with others a world of peace, mutual understanding, mutual respect, and love; of intelligent interpretations of our diverse spiritual involvements and commitments; and of collaborative exploration of our various visions of truth and good. I have no idea whether it will be practically feasible to build together a better world; the modern world is a gloomy and unpromising place... Yet fail or succeed, surely it is clear that God's will for the twenty-first century, the mission that God has entrusted to us and to all humanity, is some such ideal.¹²

Notes

- 1 Georg Schurhammer, S.J. *Francis Xavier - His Life, His Times*. Vol. IV *Japan and China 1549-1552*, Rome 1982, p.74.
- 2 *Ibid.* p.85.
- 3 Bi-yän luä Meister Yüan-wu's *Niederschrift von der Smaragdenen Felswand* übersetzt und erläutert von W. Gundert, Frankfurt 1983, Vol. III, p.154.

- 4 *Ibid.*, Vol. I pp.7f.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Vol. II pp.20f.
- 6 *Ibid.* Vol. III p.125.
- 7 John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1978, p.IX.
- 8 Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness*, New York, 1980, p.63.
- 9 Gundert, *op.cit.*, Part II, p.20.
- 10 Katsumi Takizawa, *Reflexionen über die universale Grundlage von Buddhismus und Christentum*, Frankfurt a.M., 1980, pp.64f.
- 11 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Mission, Dialogue and God's Will For Us*, IRM, Vol. 78, No. 307, July 1988, pp.366.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.373.

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INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN SOUTHALL, LONDON

Froukien Smit

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Introduction

On the very last day of 1989 I was walking on the Broadway, Southall's main shopping street. Close behind me were two young women, who were talking to each other, their arms loaded with Indian goods, just bought in the shops. I overheard part of their conversation. "It is great to go shopping here; they have got everything" one of them said. "Yes, but it must be awful to live here" the other replied. "Yes, I would hate to be out on the streets after dark" the first one agreed.

I felt quite tempted to join in the conversation, but did not do so. Instead, I walked home wondering what I would have added to their conversation. Is Southall an awful place to live in? It may seem so to the casual visitor who only sees the congested streets on a Sunday afternoon, and who has to elbow her way through the busy shops. Or maybe the two women felt about Southall like another young Indian woman from outside Southall, who recently told me that she felt oppressed in the atmosphere of Southall, oppressed by watchful eyes of her community, oppressed in her eyes by the "conservative Indian-ness".

The two women on their shopping trip are not alone in their negative opinion about Southall. Quite often people, on hearing that I live in Southall, say: "It must be difficult to live in a 'problem area' like Southall". Of course, I do not think Southall is an especially ideal place to live. I do get irritated by the congestion and the aggressive ways of driving of some people; I do get angry at the macho behaviour of some Indian men towards women (myself included), and I do get saddened by the unholy behaviour of some 'holy', religious people and by the infighting in religious and community organisations (churches included). But that is not the whole story. To me Southall has become my home. It is a place where I have found friends, hospitality and openness across barriers of race, religion, culture and language. Maybe I should have added these comments to the conversation in the street.

In this report I hope to give an impression of my journey through Southall over the past year. I feel it is a useful 'exercise' for me to evaluate and reflect on my work and I hope this report will be of interest to the sponsoring bodies of the Interfaith Project.

Links with women in Southall

My work of "developing links with women in Southall" during this year was very much a continuation of the work done in 1988. I tried to keep up contacts I made in 1988 with a number of individual women and women's organizations and I developed a few new links.

My most regular contacts are with two groups: Shanti Niketan Family Centre and the International Women's Club. Shanti Niketan is a drop-in centre for Asian women, run by Asian women and funded by the local council. I have been going there one afternoon a week over the past two years. In the beginning I went there to help out with whatever tasks there were, mainly keeping children busy whilst their mothers were learning English. But slowly my contacts with the staff and the clients have grown. I feel that I have started to be accepted as a friend. This is especially true for three members of staff, with whom I have had most regular contact. For example, sometimes they discuss problems at work with me, as one of them said recently, "you are our friend, we can trust you". That same trust I felt when at the 1989 AGM of Shanti Niketan I was elected as a member of its management committee (which is largely Asian). This trust and friendship has not come suddenly, but only after a long time of seemingly useless and wasted afternoons at the Centre where we would chat about a lot of things without it being clear to me what this had to do with interfaith work. I did feel, however, that my contact with the women of Shanti Niketan was worthwhile, even after afternoons of not understanding a word of the Punjabi and Hindi the visitors spoke, and now I am glad that I have kept up going to the Centre.

The International Women's Club (IWC) is a group of about fifteen Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian women, which meets one afternoon a week to discuss issues of interest to the members, to meet or to cook a meal. This Club used to meet at the Interfaith Project's flat in the King's Hall, but after one of the key members had a heart attack and was unable to climb the stairs, we switched venues and are now meeting in my flat. This has proved an excellent move because more women attend, probably because of the 'homely' atmosphere. At the AGM in October 1989 I was elected secretary for the IWC. This means that I have taken over the responsibility for 'running' the Club from Miss Pauline Booth, lay preacher at King's Hall, who originally started the IWC. The secretarial work includes inviting speakers, organizing trips, and carrying out correspondence. Apart from the Wednesday afternoon meetings of the Club I have regular personal contacts with a few of its members, whom I visit in their homes.

Both at Shanti Niketan and in the IWC I learn a lot about Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women, their lives and beliefs. In both groups we often have quite frank and open discussions. I have the impression that through the tales and stories I get to hear, I am in touch with a part of Indian culture and religion(s) that is not normally taught in the books on Hinduism, etc. I am not sure if it would be right to call this 'women's religion', but it seems to come to close to it.

Especially during the latter part of the year I have sometimes felt amazed at the depth of our conversations. A year ago I would not have thought it

possible that I would be talking with women of another culture and religion about things so close to our hearts, e.g. our relationship with God, our pains as women, our relationships with men. I have found out over the past two years how true it is that interfaith dialogue needs time to develop. During the first year-and-a-half it was usually me showing interest in the women at Shanti Niketan and the IWC and listening to their stories, without talking much about my life or my ideas. Over the past few months more 'dialogues' have developed. From being a mere 'listener' I have turned into a full partner in dialogue, whose feelings and opinions seem to matter to the others. At times discussions can be heated, because we do not always agree on the issues we talk about (on the nature and causes of poverty, or the role of women in religion), but they take place in a good atmosphere.

Through the Southall Women Workers Association I have got to know a number of Asian and Afro-Caribbean professional women working in the voluntary sector. With some of them I have regular contact, others I 'use' as resource persons when I need them. For example, through my contacts with a woman working for a housing association I was able to find accommodation for two Asian women living in squalid conditions. I also have good contacts with the Southall area worker of the London Borough of Ealing's Women's Unit, with whom I am planning to set up a women's interfaith group in Southall to look at "women and faith" from a critical perspective, i.e. more or less feminist. Contacts with Southall Black Sisters, a feminist Asian women's centre, have become quite good. Although this centre is not well liked in the Southall community, especially after they started the Women Against Fundamentalism campaign, I feel it is worthwhile to maintain links with this section of the (female) Asian community. They are quite isolated and need support, even when it is critical. I (and the groups of students that they have been willing to talk to) have learnt a lot from their views on racism and sexism in their own and the white community, and they seem to value our contacts.

Other women's groups I have links with are organised along religious lines; the Ahmadyya Muslim Women's Organization, the UK Islamic Mission Women's group, and a Hindu welfare group. Apart from women in these groups I have got to know a number of individual Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women, sometimes through visiting places of worship, sometimes by meeting them in the street. Some of them have become friends.

From the description of my contacts in Southall, it may have become clear that I do not see my role in dialogue purely confined to "religious" matters. I am of the opinion that meetings with people of other faiths can become 'elitist' if they are only about spiritual, elevated religious insights. I have come to see that 'spiritual' dialogue cannot be detached from the day to day lives of the women I meet, or from their material circumstances. To me it does not make sense to talk about spiritual niceties to a woman who is being maltreated by her husband. This is not to say that in such cases religion cannot be important. It can, for example, help to look at what the spiritual teachings say about relations between men and women.

To conclude this section: looking at my contacts with women in Southall, I have to come to the conclusion that not much seems to have been achieved in a visible, concrete way. Also what I have been doing so far seems rather scattered activities, mostly individual contacts. It worries me that these

contacts with individual people, and even those with institutions, might be lost for the Project once I leave. Maybe this personal edge is inherent to interfaith work, which often depends on how people get on and how much they like and trust each other. I would hope that these individual contacts do have value in themselves; they do for me and I hope they do for my partners in dialogue as well.

The fact that I was not achieving anything concrete in women's work has troubled me a great deal during this year, to the extent that I was worrying that my work was not providing "value for money". At times, when I am able to distance myself from the "trap" of wanting immediate concrete results, I do believe that good things have happened, albeit more hidden. Maybe the mission of the church or of individual members is not so much to achieve a lot in a community like Southall, but to "be there". Maybe it is enough "result" to trust and to be trusted by at least some women in the community. Perhaps it does say something about the church to others that a representative of that church comes to serve and listen, rather than to speak and organize. Perhaps its role is rather to support already existing (Asian and other) centres and groups by offering moral support (as I try to do at Shanti Niketan) or by helping to find financial support for these organisations, or by finding volunteers for work in these centres. Or is this a way of hiding my lack of community work skills behind nice theories? I am not sure, but these questions show something of the nature of my work, and that of the Project as a whole. We do not know exactly where we are going, but have to find out in the process whether it is the right way or not.

Some personal notes

Working in an area like Southall cannot but affect one as a person. Over the past two years I have personally learnt a lot. I have gained knowledge about Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam by talking to people, reading books, visiting places of worship and celebrating festivals. I have learnt about different cultures, both Asian and Afro-Caribbean. I have learnt about the pains of other people, people living in a society that is not theirs, which is a pain I sometimes share. Pains about a society that is hostile at times. I have learnt more about faith in God by meeting Christians from other parts of the world, and by sharing faith-experiences with Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

It is not purely knowledge that I have gained. I feel I am also changing as a person and as a minister/theologian. I am learning to slow down my "speed", my pace of life, in a broad sense. I am learning more and more the value of sitting down and drinking cups of (Indian) tea and hearing and reflecting about God, people and the world from a different angle than I was used to at university. Human experience has become more important than books and theories. Which is not to say that I want to dismiss my academical theological upbringing, which helps me in a more systematical reflection. But starting where people are in their thoughts, starting from experiences has enriched my theological thinking. Maybe I could say I am changing from a "theologian" into a "tea-ologian".

INTEGRATING RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VALUES
IN A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY
- One Christian's Perspective -

Paul Weller

(The following is the text of a lecture given by Mr. Weller at a meeting held in Bendorf, West Germany in February which was attended by Christians, Jews and Muslims.)

I am particularly pleased to have been asked to share some reflections from a Christian perspective on the theme of this conference, because since the beginning of January I have been working as the Head of a new Religious Resource and Research Centre at the Derbyshire College of Higher Education. This Centre aims to facilitate, and I quote, "dialogical engagement with matters of human value" - with dialogue in this context being understood in both inter-religious and inter-disciplinary terms. The title of this conference, therefore, reflects something of the challenges that I will be professionally engaged with over the next few years and so I welcome this opportunity to share in the mutual exploration and critique of one another's ideas on this theme, as Christians, as Jews and as Muslims; as religious leaders, as students and as members of the caring professions.

On turning to our theme, the first thing that I would like to note is the ambiguity which exists around the process which is described in our title - "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society". Just how a community or an individual views the process of integrating anything depends very much upon their social position and their political power or lack of it within the process of integration. What one group sees as "integration" for the common good, another less powerful

group can easily experience as "assimilation" and loss of identity to a majority ethos. The importance of these factors can be clearly illustrated from the history of the emergence of Christianity. The earliest Christians were not in a position to be active subjects in the process of integration: they could not be "the integrators". Rather, they were a small minority in the large political and military Empire of Rome. In this position they could really only be passive objects in the process of integration: they were "the integrated" ones. "The integrators" of the time could only be the imperial authorities.

In some senses imperial Rome was, like many of our modern societies, itself a multi-cultural society, at least to the extent that it was composed of people with many religious, philosophical, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, this multi-culturalism operated within a very clearly defined framework which provided the stability and the social glue for the diversity of the Empire. A basic element of this social glue was the imperial cult. This cult sought to integrate religious, social and political values by focusing them in the person of the Emperor. Because of this, the Christian minority found themselves in an extremely difficult position. On the one hand, their apostolic leaders taught them that they should acknowledge the

legitimate authority of the Emperor in the administration of justice. And in terms of sheer pragmatism, if the Christian Church was to be able even to survive, let alone to grow, the authority of the Emperor could not be directly challenged. But because of their belief in God as the Creator, and in Jesus as the promised Messiah, the early Christians could only see the authority of the Emperor in relative terms. For them ultimate authority was vested in the God whom they believed had raised Jesus from the dead. The earliest Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord", shows that from the beginning Christians were resistant to being the objects of the integration process initiated by the Roman Empire. To confess Jesus as "Lord" and "Messiah" was to deny the ultimate lordship of the Emperor. Early Christians found themselves in the position of having to find a modus vivendi within the existing imperial framework so that they could have enough social space to exist without losing their distinctive identity and community life.

After the Emperor Constantine's adoption of Christianity, the position of the Christian community changed and a new process of integrating religious, social and political values developed in which Christian religious values combined with Byzantine social and political values resulted in Christians becoming "the integrators" who were now in the social position of trying to integrate others on Christian terms. After the Emperor Constantine's adoption of Christianity and the subsequent development of the phenomenon of Christendom, membership of the religious community of the Church became almost a prerequisite for full participation in the life of civil society. As a result of this development the Jewish communities of Europe were forced to begin their long history of suffering: of expulsions, of expropriations, of pogroms, of

forced conversions, of creeping assimilation, and finally of attempted extermination.

The symbiosis of Church and State which was represented by the phenomenon of Christendom in its heyday was not fundamentally challenged by the advent of the Lutheran, Reformed or Anglican Reformations. The only change in this regard was that the process of religious, social and political integration split down into the separate geographical areas of the emerging nation-states instead of being a part of the wider concept of Christendom. In the United Kingdom today, one remnant of this particular project for integrating religious, social and political values can be found in the established status of the Church of England. Although many think that this status is merely a quaint and historically irrelevant, in a country which has no written Constitution, it is, in fact, a vital part of the complex nexus of religious, social and political values which make up the British State. This can be illustrated from the dual role of the Monarch as Head of State and Defender of the Faith; from the reserved places for a number of Anglican bishops in the House of Lords; and in many other aspects of the British political and legal system.

In a recent article in the Thames Independent newspaper, the Anglican Archbishop of York, Dr. John Habgood argued that societies with a dominant and recognized religious tradition offer better possibilities for the affirmation of religious values in general, and for the position of religious minorities in particular than do those societies which do not have such a dominant single tradition. For example, Habgood argued that:

At present the existence of officially-recognized Christian holy days as part of our genera

culture brings to public awareness the need for other faiths to be given space for their own observances within their own communities.

And furthermore that:

Marriage laws, the role of women in society, education, food laws, the relationship between religious law and civil law in general...all these and more are profoundly dependent on whether there is a dominant cultural tradition with respected sub-cultures, and also dependent upon which tradition it is which predominates.

However, Habgood actually went further than this and questioned whether the whole idea of a multi-cultural, multi-faith society is either an accurate description of what currently exists in Britain or is a desirable goal. He argues that:

A true multi-cultural, multi-faith society without a predominant tradition would either have to live with total confusion in many essential aspects of its life or, more likely, move swiftly towards complete secularism.

At first sight this argument might seem to be supported by the experience of those societies where national and state religions were removed from public life and an attempt was made to replace them with communist ideology. Perhaps precisely because the state can have such a tendency to claim absolute power for itself and its political values, it could be argued that the presence of an established religion at least provides an institutionalized sign and reminder that the State does not represent the only form of authority, and that the authority which it has is not absolute. But whilst this argument might be theoretically convincing, does it

really coincide with the role that is often actually played by religious traditions when they are allowed to be dominant social forces?

To take the example of the eastern part of our continent: as the communist parties lose their grip on power and the possibilities for religious freedom appear to expand, who will benefit from these possibilities, and at whose expense will they be? What will, in fact, be the future for minority religious communities in these countries when majorities are once more able to give expression to what is often an explosive mixture of a religious and a national/ethnic consciousness, with all the dangers for religious, ethnic and national minorities which such a symbiosis brings? We have already seen that although Turkish Muslims suffered under the Bulgarian regime of Todor Zhivkov, the efforts of the new communist government in Bulgaria to redress these wrongs have been met with popular opposition and anger. In the Soviet Union, Azerbaijani Muslims have been involved in bloody clashes against the Armenian Christian minority in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, and glasnost has led to Russian chauvinism and anti-semitism revealing itself once more in the activities of organized groups such as Pamyat. From a religious perspective it is no doubt true that complete secularism is to be judged as something which distorts and impoverishes both personal and social life. However, this should not be used as a reason for ignoring the important contribution that secularity and the proper autonomy of intellectual disciplines and social institutions can make in overcoming the social dangers of religious enthusiasm and dominance - dangers which before the rise of secularity led to years of bloody religious wars in Europe.

Returning to Habgood's argument from

another angle is there not at least a hint to be found in it of the religious equivalent of "the white's burden" argument which used to be advanced as a justification for the power and influence of whites in the colonial status quo? Is the modern apologia for that form of integrating religious, social and political values which is represented in the continued establishment of the Church of England now to be presented as "the Christian's burden" in a multi-faith society, under the protection of which other religious traditions are supposed to shelter? Should we not take the breaking up of geographical religious monopolies in modern western Europe as an opportunity for re-examining whether the model of an established or State religion is any longer appropriate for the multi-cultural societies in which we live? Is it really beyond the bounds of possibility to envisage other models for the task of "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society" - models which would neither presuppose the predominance of one religious tradition in the public life of society, nor the exclusion of all religions?

Habgood is not alone in thinking this is both impossible and undesirable. From a different perspective than that of an Anglican Archbishop the novelist Fay Weldon has declared in her pamphlet Sacred Cows that:

Our attempt at multi-culturalism is dead. The Rushdie affair demonstrates it.

She then goes on to unfavourably compare the British attempt at multi-culturalism with the un-culturalist policy of the USA. She argues that in the USA one can believe and do what one likes in private but in public:

...the one flag is saluted, the one God is worshipped, the one nation acknowledged.

However, viewed from the perspective of religious believers who affirm an ultimate reality, Weldon's seeming enthusiasm for the "one flag" and the "one nation" seems no less idolatrous and dangerous to religious values than the commitment of Stalinists to the dominance of the "one party". In response to critics such as Weldon I think that it must be admitted that sometimes enthusiasts for multi-culturalism have spoken a little too glibly about the opportunities presented by a multi-faith society. One of the good results of the Rushdie controversy is that we will no longer be able to get away with such superficiality. Those of us who still hold on to the dream of building a truly multi-cultural society and are also concerned about the practicalities of how that dream might be translated ever more fully into our present realities will now have to demonstrate that we are indeed facing up to the very real, complex and serious issues which are involved in such a social project.

Fay Weldon's reference to the Salman Rushdie controversy as an argument for the failure of multi-culturalism shows that the debate surrounding this book has raised many serious questions for both Church and society about hitherto accepted models for "integrating religious, cultural and political values". It has revealed a good deal of mutual incomprehension between the adherents of different religious traditions in regard to their diverse visions of how society and individuals within it should try to go about "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society". In his book Be Careful with Muhammad!: The Salman Rushdie Affair Shabir Akhtar, a leading Muslim campaigner against The Satanic Verses has argued that despite the traditional role of Christianity in British society, contemporary British Christians have now largely accepted

new framework for the "integration of religious, social and political values". This framework, argues Akhtar, is one which assumes the dominance of a framework supplied by the secular liberal tradition, albeit tinged with Christian influences. Akhtar furthermore argues that the Rushdie controversy has challenged this consensus and shown that the million to a million and a quarter Muslims in the United Kingdom are no longer prepared to play the role assigned to them by the current British ground rules for integration.

In making this challenge, Muslims have highlighted a fundamental clash of values between, on the one hand, those who see the framework for civil society as being provided by the ideology of the nation-state and on the other hand those who adhere to the Muslim vision and ideal of the Islamic 'Ummah. Some Christians have perceived the force of this challenge to modern British society. For example, in a letter that was published in the The Independent newspaper, Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin acknowledged that:

Blasphemy has become a meaningless concept in contemporary British society because it is not seriously believed that God exists. The supreme reality on which we rely for welfare is the nation state. To betray the interests of the nation is therefore the supreme crime, but blasphemy is a joke.

As a result of this clash of values many Muslims in Britain have redoubled their demands for state-funded Muslim schools, since the education system is a key arena for the interplay of power and powerlessness in the process of "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society". It is also of significance that the Rushdie affair has given birth to the foundation of a British Islamic Party. This has occurred due

to the exasperation of some Muslims with the failure of the existing British political parties to understand Muslim concerns and relate to Muslim perspectives, but it is also related to a particular Islamic conception of the relationship between religious belief, ethical practice and social organisation. Of course, not all Muslims support the demand for separate state-funded Muslim schools and fewer still support the new Islamic Party, but these developments indicate an alternative vision to the secular liberal consensus for the task of "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society". But the question does need to be raised as to whether religiously-based schooling and religiously-based political organisation really represents a viable and appropriate alternative in a society of many religious traditions in which there are also many citizens who are not members of a religious community in any sense?

Stated in an extreme way, it would seem to me that in a society whose members have varied religious commitments and none, it is as undesirable to have the Shar'ia or the Torah enshrined at the heart of national life as it is to have the current establishment of a section of the Christian Church. But now is perhaps the time for me to declare that in all I have said so far I am speaking out of an alternative strand of Christian tradition to that which is represented by the Roman Catholic Church or by the Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican Reformation. This is the congregationalist strand of Christianity which broke the symbiosis of Church and State. In this Christian tradition, the religious community was separated from the civil community and religious authority from civil authority. Belonging to the religious community was determined on the basis of a free and personal commitment rather than on

the basis of a geographical accident of birth. And it was because of such convictions that, as early as the 17th century, the founder of the English Baptist movement, Thomas Helwys, could declare that:

...men's religion to God, is betwixt God and themselves: the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks (i.e. Muslims), Jews, or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.

This tradition of Christianity has, from its earliest days, affirmed religious liberty. It has also recognized the relative autonomy of social and political values. Its weakness, of course, is that its approach can degenerate into the privatisation of the religious vision, making religious commitment seem only a matter of individual consumer preference in a supermarket of religions. In the USA, where this congregationalist tradition played a major historical role in bringing about the Constitutional separation of Church and State, religious commitment has sometimes been reduced to the infamous advertising billboard which announces, "worship God this Sunday in the church of your choice", or as the advertising executives might rewrite it for people involved in Bendorf conferences, "worship God this Friday, Saturday or Sunday in the mosque, synagogue or church of your choice!"

But the stance represented by such as Thomas Helwys was most definitely not an expression of theological indifference. The Baptist vision of Christianity remained passionately committed to its understanding of the truth and the values which this contained. It has been prepared to contend for this vision and these values in open and spirited debate

with others, as can be seen from this tradition's commitment to Christian evangelism. In contradiction to Shabir Akhtar's argument that contemporary western Christian tolerance is only the product of its convictions having been weakened by the acids of secular relativism, for Christians of this tradition their advocacy of religious liberty and the separation of Church and State has always been based upon a theological imperative. It is an imperative that is rooted in a basic conviction about the nature of religion and belief - which is that it must be free, chosen and responsible rather than imposed, assumed or only inherited.

In the final analysis it seems to me that Christians of today must operate within some such perspective if they are to be able to positively contribute to the construction of a social framework within which people with different and sometimes conflicting values can hope to live, and yet respect one another sufficiently to agree on pragmatic ways of living together within a process of "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society". To live by such a vision requires a commitment to engage in dialogue both with people of other faiths and with people who express their commitments and values in secular terms; it will require the imagination to dream dreams of alternative projects; and it will require the patience and realism to work long and hard in dialogue on the practical details of how such alternative projects for "integrating religious, social and political values in a multi-cultural society" could be brought to fruition for the benefit of all.

RECONCILIATION AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

S. Wesley Ariarajah

(The following paper was presented to a Seminar on Reconciliation and the Role of Religion in Situations of Armed Conflict, conducted in Sigtuna, Sweden, in November 1989)

During the last few years I have given a number of talks in the churches on the question of interreligious dialogue. This is part of my responsibility with the World Council of Churches.

In the course of these lectures I have come to expect two kinds of questions from those who have reservations about interfaith dialogue. The first invariably is on the Bible. "But Jesus said", someone would say, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me"; in that context is not dialogue a betrayal of Christian witness?"

No sooner has one attempted to answer that question then comes the other intended to be more damaging to the dialogue enterprise: "What about Lebanon, Sudan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Punjab? Have you been able to do anything about them through your interfaith dialogue?" The question is meant to convey that dialogue is some kind of an abstract elitist activity having little relevance to our life!

The second question does not only come from those who doubt the importance of dialogue. Even those who support the dialogue ministry worry about the fact that the practice of dialogue has not been effectively applied to conflict situations. "What is the role of interfaith dialogue in our efforts at reconciliation" they ask, obviously dismayed at the little success it has had in the past.

Almost every time, I have had to answer that interfaith dialogue has in fact been able to do very little about these conflicts, and indeed cannot hope to do much about them.

Such an admission comes not from theoretical considerations about the role of dialogue in conflict situations. Rather it comes from practical experience of being able to do very little with communities which are already embroiled in conflict.

I was not in Sri Lanka during the major ethnic upheaval in 1983. But I was there during earlier riots. Soon after the 1978 riots, for example, a group of us based in Colombo - Buddhist and Christian clergy along with leaders from the Hindu and Muslim community - attempted a mission of reconciliation. We were able to enlist the help of a leading cinema actor at that time, Gamini Fonseka. He drew the crowds so that we could talk to the people about what had happened and of the need for reconciliation and peace, especially as followers of some of the major religious traditions of the world.

What struck me most was that at all these meetings, there wasn't a single person against reconciliation and the need to live together in peace. Almost everyone present at our meetings, Sinhalese and Tamils alike, were shocked and ashamed at what had happened, blaming the riots on a small

sector of society. Yet we were all aware of some corporate responsibility, and that this small sector could never have inflicted so much suffering, but for the fact that the alienation between the two communities was at a point where one had only to strike a single match to set the whole nation ablaze.

I was then reminded of a report written by Professor Masao Takanaka of Japan, after a pastoral team visit organized by the World Council of Churches, to what was then Ceylon after the 1958 ethnic riots.

He wrote that in Sri Lanka individual Tamils and Sinhalese had little against one another. In fact, some of the deepest friendships existed between the people of these communities. There were many mixed marriages between the two showing the continuous and friendly atmosphere in which Sinhalese and Tamil met and interacted.

But, he continued, as two communities, as two people, as two social entities, there existed among Tamils and Sinhalese a deep suspicion, mutual mistrust and even enmity that could not easily be dealt with or overcome.

In fact in most of the conflict situations we will study at this conference, where religion has a role to play, we will be dealing primarily with the common corporate consciousness of people. There are situations where there is a complex web of historical, social and religious factors at work which bring about a social psyche that is hard to get hold of, and deal with. They are fed by historical enmities and collective memory and are based on social and religious formations as communities, which are often expressed and defined against other communities.

The word reconciliation, therefore, must be dealt with at the different

levels to which it is applied. There is a level of search for reconciliation where one seeks to find a mutually acceptable basis to end a specific conflict or disharmony. Experience shows that an appeal to religious sentiments has little effect in this effort. This belongs to the area of peaceful methods of resolving conflicts and is an area of expertise of its own. Even though expressions of solidarity across the communities through dialogue helps the process, the resolution of the conflict itself requires special efforts that go beyond dialogue.

Unfortunately joint statements by religious leaders for calm and harmony, although well intended and important as they are in their symbolic value, have often never been effective and sometimes appear even rather pathetic. While not belittling the importance of any effort that is a sign of solidarity across the communities in conflict, religious leaders getting together to make appeals only during conflict situations, appears to be rather hypocritical and self-serving. For at that moment they seem not to be consistent with, but rather at odds with, the main trends of social formation promoted by each of the religious communities in conflict. For the same reasons, individuals getting together for dialogue in the context of their communities engaged in conflict, have also had a difficult time. While their willingness to be a community of solidarity across group conflict is itself of great value and importance, it has had little or no effect on the larger issue of reconciliation. For once conflict has begun, solidarity across the boundary is seen by others as betrayal.

It is of course important to attempt to get religious groups in conflict to enter into conversation and to encourage mutual respect and understanding.

But the task of reconciling communities in conflict has to take into account, as a matter of great importance, the long-term relationships of groups that have grown up in spiritual isolation.

True Reconciliation

A deeper level of reconciliation is that which deals with the social and religious formation of the communities as a whole. It seeks to bring about healing and wholeness and it attempts to break down barriers erected centuries ago through collective self-consciousness. This is a much harder task and immediate results cannot be expected. It needs perseverance, hope and faith, and those engaged in it may never get to see its results in their own life-time. It is in this area that interfaith dialogue has something significant to offer.

What are some of the issues here ?

1. The problem of Identity and Relationship

Whatever other function religion has in the life of individuals and communities, one important role is that it provides a person with a corporate identity.

Identity is very important to all human beings. It gives a sense of security and belonging, rootedness and direction which is basic to human existence. By providing a meaningful system and by enabling persons to celebrate that meaning - i.e. through worship, liturgy, festivals, religious observances etc., religions sustain the life of people in community. Lack of identity and no sense of belonging to a community, can lead people to neurotic behaviour at different levels, which is often at the heart of some of the social evils of our time. Thus identity and its formation are important to individuals and to people collectively.

But, the identity formation of individuals and communities can and, unfortunately, often does take place in isolation from all other communities. Where historical collective negative memory is strong, communal identities can take place against, or in opposition to other communities. In the case of religious groups it can appear in such a way that the other religious groups are seen as rivals or even hostile communities. The main problem in this formation is that usually it is never done consciously or intentionally. But such a social and religious formation, I submit, is at the heart of most conflicts that have religious roots or components to them.

True reconciliation between communities which have historically seen each other as mutually exclusive or rival communities, can only take place if there is a new experience of the other communities, (not during conflict), as communities of mutuality. This experience can only come about through existential encounter of groups of peoples and their mutual discovery that they, together, belong to a larger community.

Interfaith dialogue is an attempt to help communities to discover each other in a new way. It is based on the assumption that it is not only important for me to know the other, but that I need the other to know myself truly. It is an attempt to create a common and inclusive "we". It has to do with healing. For all reconciliation begins with healing. Healing is a slow and natural process. All doctors know that they do not heal, but provide the circumstances in which the body can heal itself. They can prevent infection but cannot effect healing. Interfaith dialogue provides the circumstances in which reconciliation comes about by the development of identity-in-relationship.

2. Reconciliation and the attitude to Plurality

At the heart of all reconciliation is also the question of our attitude to plurality. As I said earlier, appeals by religious leaders for tolerance and harmony during conflict situations lack credibility because, in their ongoing life, they remain ambiguous in their attitude to plurality. The way some of the religions and some ethnic or social groups have defined themselves, and the attitude they promote towards other religions, clearly militate against plurality. Even some of the so-called tolerant religions, while respecting plurality as a phenomenological reality, tend to implicitly claim absolute or final validity to their own paths. We must recognize that reconciliation can never take place if one partner is convinced that his way is the only way, that he is in some sense superior to the other. Reconciliation requires that everybody agrees with their perspective.

As the world shrinks and people are thrown together, the approach to plurality becomes a crucial issue. There have been two different efforts to respond to the challenge of living in a religiously plural world. The first, arising from the enlightenment culture and building on technology and modernity, attempted to create a monolithic technocratic culture serving as a common umbrella over all particularities. It appeared at one time as if this attempt would succeed, and some of the undiscerning prophets of this culture predicted the demise of the "long night of religion".

But today we know that religions are alive and well. In most societies where religion, culture and political life have never been seen as separate realities, there is increasing pressure for religion to take its place in social and political life. How can we deal with this reality? It is here that interreligious dialogue again plays a crucial role. Dialogue enables peoples to see plurality not

as a threat but as a blessing. Dialogue encourages people to be mutually engaged, without denying or belittling the otherness of the other. It is a practice that generates not only greater understanding and mutual enrichment, but also mutual correction and criticism without destroying community.

Dialogue seeks to promote a community of conversation, a community of heart and mind, a community of mutuality and a community of communities across religious and other barriers. It does not ask us to deny our particularity, but it requires of us to respect the distinctiveness of others. It defends what is important to its own community but only in the context of defending what is good for all. Interfaith dialogue, indeed dialogue of any kind, when it is genuine, is an essential pre-requisite for any long-term reconciliation. Reconciliation arises from accepting and being accepted. It is the art of mixing the plurality of our life into a wider and coherent meaning-system in which all have a part and role to play. Such an attitude requires not only a new approach to the religious traditions of others, but also requires religious communities to rethink their own self-understandings, their own theological-philosophical bases and practices.

I am certain that there are those who are always disappointed that interreligious dialogue is not a quick answer to the problems and conflicts of the world. But we know that reconciliation has little to do with a quick-fix. The task of reconciling a world that is so pluralistic, so divided and so manipulated is slow and hard. We must remember we are dealing with a world in which there is too much hurt, too many bad memories and too much spilt blood. Healing takes time, but those who provide the conditions for healing and reconciliation should not lose hope. Those who want to seek reconciliation through interfaith dialogue should have the courage to hope, and the faith to endure.

